# Proceedings of the Regional Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education Organized by Education For Sustainable Development (ESD)

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## Foreword

Early Childhood Care and Education is the subject of considerable debate and interest among different actors in all parts of the world. Evidences have also shown the long- term benefits of offering young children quality care and education in the early years.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) organized a national workshop entitled “Sharing and Learning for Scaling up Early Childhood Care and Education Interventions” (Nov-24-26, 2015). The main objective of the conference was to create a forum on early childhood care and education where stakeholders come together and share best practice and lessons to be replicated and scaled up at policy and grassroots levels. A total of 88 representatives of stakeholders participated on the conference for three days in Debre Birhan. The participants were representatives of Children, Parents, Primary School Heads, Preschool Teachers, Primary School Teachers, ESD’s staff, five District Education Offices, North Shoa Zone Education Department, Amhara Region Education Bureau, Amhara Region Women and Children Affairs Bureau, SNNPR Education Bureau, Oromia Education Bureau, AAU, Debre Birhan Teachers Education College, Kotebe University College, Likeminded NGOs, Charities and Societies Agency and Ministry of Education.

By organizing the National Conference, ESD has tried to give a snapshot of modalities on preschool education where lessons learnt from the field, experiences from practitioners, research on the subject matter have been shared. Though much focus has been given to preschool education we hope the documentation of the proceedings of the conference offers sound underpinning theory and practice needed by those who wish to work or are working in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education.

On behalf of ESD staff and myself, I would like to express my gratitude to all children who have attended our preschool provisions and their parents, school communities, communities at large, government stakeholders and donors who made it possible for us to contextualize, to link theory and practice in order to improve access and quality of preschool education, which is fundamental for a good start and success in schooling, an endeavor that ESD stands for.

Last not least, I would like to express my gratitude to Fondation pour une Solidarit'e Internationale (FSI) based in Switzerland for its dedicated support to ECCE program from the beginning.

Amsale Mulugeta
Executive Director

## Preface and Acknowledgements

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is an Ethiopian Residents' Charity established in 2007 as a result of initiatives taken by a few educated, experienced and committed Ethiopian mothers who felt the need to contribute towards the development of Child Care and Education and the development of women socially and economically. Education for sustainable Development (ESD) has been working on Early Childhood Care and Education among programs since 2008 focusing on preschool education. The objective of this intervention is creating a stimulating environment that supports the social, emotional, language, motor, cognitive and physical development of children and preparing them for a good start at school. ESD believes that "Early Childhood matters and therefore ECCE interventions are very fundamental in laying the foundation for the healthy development of the growing child.

ESD organized a regional conference on Early Childhood Education and Care from 24 to 26 November 2016 at GETVA Hotel in Debrebirhan Town. The general objective of the conference was to create opportunities for stakeholders in Early Childhood Education and Care to learn from each other best practices. Among others, Childhood Education and Care-related policy issues, reports of studies carried out in the local context on Childhood Education and Care, and visits to preschool intervention centers were the areas of focus during the conference. Participants from a wide range of organizations attended the conference [please see Annex I for the complete list of the participants].

Overall, the conference was a success. Apparently, it made opportunities available for the stakeholders to take home from the conference knowledge and experience that they could adapt and make use of in their own context to scale up the endeavors they make to achieve the goals of Education for Sustainable Development.

ESD would like to express its gratitude to the Federal Ministry of Education; research paper presenters; development partners; community leaders in the intervention sites, and teachers and facilitators of the target schools [early childhood care and education centers].

## 1. Introduction to the Conference

As mentioned earlier, the general purpose of the conference was to enable the stakeholders in Early Childhood Education and Care to learn useful lessons from each other; and then, adapt and use them to enrich the efforts they make to realize the goals of Early Childhood Education and Care in the selected sites in North Showa Zone.

The following were the specific purposes of the regional conference conducted in Debrebrihan Town from 24 to 26 November 2016:

- Review experiences of ESD and other stakeholders working on ECCE and share relevant experiences,
- Enhance productive engagement of civil society with government stakeholders and im prove ECCE services for disadvantaged children,
- Share workable and research based approaches taken by different stakeholders that fo cus on the thematic areas,
- Raise among the general public and bring about changes in child development,
- Disseminate positive examples of preschool intervention and create public awareness that will contribute to building a good image of the civil society,
- Harmonize the engagements of interested stakeholders [GO, Community, and NGOs] for relevant, effective and efficient intervention in the area of Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Suggest commonly agreed ECCE interventions for policy recommendations

The expected outputs of the conference included the following:

- Research based facts and figures that can bring in-puts for policy makers and im plementers delivered.
- Innovative and effective approaches /strategies for ECCE implementation deduced
- More insights on the current ECCE intervention by the stakeholders acquired
- Commitment and engagement of key stakeholders in ECCE interventions en hanced
- Consensus is reached on ECCE intervention that are affordable, accessible and adaptable modalities for policy inputs
- Research based papers and best practices [i.e. conference proceedings] as refer ences for partner organizations and the MOE are documented and disseminated.

## 2. Keynote speeches

### 2.1 Introduction and Welcome speech made by W/ro Amsale Mulugeta

**W/ro Amsale Mulugeta Executive Director of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**

W/ro Amsale Mulugeta, ESD Executive Director, began her speech by thanking the participants for coming to take part in the conference. In her speech, W/ro Amsale Mulugeta, also thanked a number of individuals and organizations for the contributions each made, in one way or another, to organize the conference . In particular, the Executive Director expressed her indebtedness to:

- Foundation Solidaritat International and Plan International Ethiopia for sponsoring the con ference
- The conference taskforce members for committing their precious time to organizing the con ference (Please see Appendix II for the names of members of the taskforce.)
- ESD staff members
- GETVA Hotel for permission to use the meeting hall and other conference facilities against reduced prices during the conference, and
- Debrebirhan University for allowing us to use its buses during the field visits.

Following her words of thanks, the Executive Director depicted that the three-day long conference would deal with various issues of early childhood education. She said early childhood education is the concern of every one, as all have passed through that stage of development. In addition to experiencing the stage themselves, W/ro Amsale added that all have experienced the stage either through their own children or through other children who could be found under their custody. She noted the Early Childhood Education and Care framework guideline, which was issued by the government in 2009, clearly states that early childhood education is an indicator of quality in the education offered at different levels in the country.

The Executive Director pointed out that Education for Sustainable Development was established in November 2007 and started its development program by focusing on children and women. In her speech, W/ro Amsale acknowledged the efforts made by the government to address issues of preschool education through Early Childhood Education and Care approaches. She said ECCE came into existence to provide a stimulating environment where children can develop their personality through interacting with each other and with the environment. This, the Executive Director said, could enhance the children's physical, emotional, cognitive and linguistic development.

W/ro Amsale used the German word Kindergarten to further illustrate her concern about early childhood education. She said, the German word Kinder, when translated into English, is 'children' and Garten is 'garden'. She said the coiners of the term kindergarten related children with garden. "To grow, flourish and bear fruit," the Executive Director added, "a plant normally needs suitable soil, sunlight, air, water and a protector." "Children," she said, "in a similar manner, need proper nutrition, health care, a loving and stimulating environment; and above all, they need love of a care giver."

The Executive Director further noted, "When ESD started its development program it was with a focus on children, specifically early childhood care and education - preschool education for children of ages 4-6 years. It started its interventions in four rural and semi-rural areas of North Shoa Zone, namely, in Dabale, Wishwashegn, Chacha and Cheki kebeles." She mentioned lack of awareness of the impact of ECCE interventions on the development of the child in the communities; lack of skilled manpower; and shortage of inputs such as playing and learning materials as examples of the challenges ESD faced at the start of the program in the selected zone.

W/ro Amsale mentioned two strategies ESD used to cope with the challenges faced at the earliest stage of the ECCE intervention program: giving the necessary technical support themselves to the centers, and getting practitioners trained at Wolayta Montessori Training Center. This, the Director said, was eventually followed by ESD's opening of its own Pedagogical Resource Center where low-cost playing, learning and teaching materials could be produced and distributed to targeted preschool education centers.

In addition, W/ro Amsale pointed out that ESD had the intention of publishing children's books. She said stories, idioms, puzzles, etc. that could serve as contents of the books had already been collected from the surrounding school communities.

It became clear from the Executive Director's speech that the four preschool education centers which were established by ESD had recently been handed over to local government to continue functioning. W/ro Amsale pointed out that opening freestanding preschool education center any longer was an expensive strategy. Because of this, she said, ESD had shifted to a new strategy of attaching preschool education program to the regular primary school education. The Execu-

tive Director promised that ESD would ensure the sustainability of the ongoing program through strengthening its partnership with the local government and other partners in the area. In addition to connecting preschool program to the primary school education and strengthening it there, W/ro Amsale said, ESD also would continue to work on community-based preschool education program. According to the Director, ESD's programs in North Shewa focus on early childhood care and education; quality primary education; women self-help program; youth vocational skills training; and girls' empowerment.

The Executive Director mentioned Angolela and Tera, Seya Debre Wayu and Debrebirhan Town as ESD's target areas in North Shoa Zone. The expansion of the ESD program to Melga Woreda and Hawassa Zuria Administration in Sidama zone, SNNPR, was also made clear in the Executive Director's speech.

As her final remarks, the Executive Director said ESD gained remarkable experience through exchange of knowledge and experience with other partners and professionals in the area. She said ESD owes its achievements and success over the last six years mainly to the genuine collaboration it managed to obtain from government partners, Woreda authorities, schools, and local communities. The Director noted that ESD highly recognized the values of the knowledge and experience stakeholders could exchange when appropriate forums are made available to them. The need for the regional conference organized at GETVA Hotel in Debrebirhan Town arose from ESD's recognition of the values of such forums, the Executive Director added.

She said participants would learn much from the scholarly papers and reports of the findings of related research to be presented. In addition, she continued, discussion sessions that will follow each presentation will be useful learning and teaching forum for everyone here.

She remarked that ensuring the development and prosperity of the nation requires us to have children who are physically strong and mentally active and self-confident. One way to make this happen is through creating forums, such as this conference, for concerned stakeholders to come together and exchange their best practices. That was why, the Executive Director commented, she would expect participants to contribute their fair share to the success of the conference .

Before wishing participants to have a fruitful time during their three-day stay at the Debrebirhan conference , the Executive Director, invited them to see ESD Pedagogical Resource Center's products that would stay displayed in the hall during the three-day conference, and to visit selected preschool intervention sites located in the area on the third day of the conference.

## 2.2 Opening remark by Mr. Werner Ruedy

**Mr. Werner Ruedy President of FSI Foundation**

Following the ESD Executive Director's welcoming note, Mr. Werner Ruedy, President of FSI Foundation, made the following conference opening remarks.

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Werner Ruedy. We represent our family foundation, i.e. International Foundation for Solidarity.

We are happy to be here and witness the great interest in the topic - Early Childhood Education. Many of you have for years been dealing with questions concerning a better education system in Ethiopia but a few are aware that formation begins well before the first year of primary school.

Amsale Mulugeta asked in 2007 if we would be able to support ESD in the formation of preschool in the area of Debrebirhan. She explained that the number of dropouts after the first year of schooling was very high and that many of these children would not repeat the first grade, as they would not be sent to school by their parents any more. She said this challenged many of the children.

All children in cities and rural communities of the European countries visit kindergarten for one or two years. This gives them the opportunity to develop their intellectual and social skills and prepare themselves to face the challenges of the formal school. The visit enables them to playfully learn to assert and integrate themselves into a group. In addition, they take the first step to the world of numbers and letters.

We found Amsale's request convincing, and together with ESD, decided to start a pilot project with 4 preschools in the rural areas around Debrebirhan.

To make a project for small children work, parents - especially mothers - have to be involved. In the first year of the project, we managed to make arrangement for 320 preschool children to visit

the preschool centers. In the subsequent year, apparently, it was not difficult for us to organize women into groups and make them participate in the discussion of the advantages of preschool experience for children. In fact, the challenges we faced were to find suitable teachers to train and to produce necessary teaching tools to be used with preschool children in the zone.

Two years later, we began to see positive effects of preschool visit on the children who received an early education according to ESD preschool pattern. In the first year, children with preschool experience achieved much better results in subjects like Amharic, Mathematics and English than those who did not have preschool experience. Children with preschool experience also showed much better social skills than the students with no preschool background experience. Social skills are excellent basis for entering school.

Today, i.e., eight years after the inception of the program, there are 38 preschool centers under the auspices of ESD in the country, with many motivated teachers that have suitable training. In these centers, there are 4680 children. There are thousands of satisfied parents behind these children.

ESD fully understands how important skills such as painting and drawing are for the intellectual and creative development of small children. Because of this, as a pilot project, ESD has planned to set up corners for painting and drawing in preschool centers.

Who knows if early childhood development can be additionally enriched with a music lesson in the near future? To ensure the sustainability of the success story of preschool centers, we hope to see the earnest interest that the ladies and gentlemen gathered here will show in the discussions they make to share knowledge, experiences and best practices connected to preschool and early childhood education in the next three days of this conference . The children we talk about today are the ones who will tomorrow be responsible for advancing this country forward.

Thank you for your attention.

## 2.3 Opening speech by Ato Abebe Tamir

**Ato Abebe Tamir ECCE Process Owner ANRS Education Bureau**

First of all I welcome you all to this ECCE regional conference. As we all know, preschool education is believed to have a great influence on quality of education for primary school children. Our education and training policy mainly left this program to private investors and the communities. Due to this, the program in the region, and even at national level, remained almost neglected until 2009.

However, over the last few years, the Amhara Regional State has managed to take the initiative to improve the situation. The Region did this by opening 'O-class' in primary schools in the region. The coverage status of preschool education which was below 2%in the region before the year 2009 has now exceeded fifty percent. This is mainly due to the increased attention given to the program over the last years. Evidence available at formal school shows that children who have passed through preschool perform in class better than those who directly joined formal school. At the moment, more than 902,000 children are attending preschool education in the region.

With respect to teachers in preschool education program, training for preschool teachers is given in 10 teacher education colleges in the region. This contributes much to minimizing shortage of preschool teachers. There is also a supply of preschool teaching materials in the region. In addition, in collaboration with non-government organizations in the area, it has now become possible to create model preschool education centers in the region.

The achievements recorded so far, such as the increase in the preschool coverage in the region, are really encouraging. There are however major gaps that still need to be filled including shortage of in-put, lack of trained teachers, unattractive learning environment and limited support from the local communities. Mitigating such problems requires concerted efforts from NGOs like ESD and other partner organizations, government agencies and community organizations.

I would like to thank ESD for initiating this conference and encouraging us all to actively participate in the program. Before thanking you all for your attention, allow me to declare this conference open.

Thank you.

### 2.4 Keynote address by Ato Daniel Abebe

**Ato Daniel Abebe Curriculum Development and Implementation Directorate Director, MOE**

First of all, I would like to extend my gratitude to the conference organizers who honored me to provide this keynote address representing the Curriculum Development and Implementation Directorate, MOE.

I would like to join colleagues who spoke before me to welcome you all to this ECCE conference. As you all know, the government has been actively working in the last 20 years to address access, equity, quality and efficiency of education. For example, the efforts made to enable out-of-school children to enroll in school, and the result achieved has placed Ethiopia among the countries that have met the Millennium Development Goals in the education sector.

It is clear that education has been made accessible to nearly all children in the country. Much has also been done to improve the quality although much more is desired to be achieved yet in this regard. Therefore, a further and a more strenuous effort is still waiting ahead of us to fully address issues of access, equity, quality and efficiency in the education our children receive.

One of the tasks to be done well is early childhood education. Preschool education coverage was 4.3% at the national level. And the scope of the expansion of the program was mainly limited to KGs which are manly owned and run by private individuals in urban areas. This means that the rural children had not yet become beneficiaries of preschool education programs. Most children in rural areas used to skip preschool and join formal school at their late age.

In response, the government planned to give a greater attention to the program in the year 2009. Furthermore, with continuous effort of NGOs like Education for Sustainable Development and other cooperative partners, the national coverage of preschool program has now reached 43.3%. In this process, the government has introduced various preschool education modes to expedite delivery of the program in the country. For instance, as a transition period approach, the government has introduced an approach called the 'O-class' in all primary schools in the country. The child-to-child program is another approach that came into use in the preschool education sector. In the ESDP V the government has set a goal to raise the national coverage of the preschool education program to 80%.

Preschool education enables children to acquire the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy. The other greater advantage of preschool program is the substantial decrease of school dropout rate, as some studies indicate. Working in preschool program is believed by the government to contribute to quality of education.

In addition to the 'O-class' and 'Child-to-Child' approach, the government, in collaboration with UNICEF, has recently launched a new 4$^{th}$alternative; namely, Accelerated School Readiness program. This is a new program for children who have not received the chance of preschool education. Accelerated school readiness is a 2-month program mainly prepared for children of age 7 who never joined school. At the moment, this program is being piloted in Benishangul-Gumuz Region. Replicating the program in the other regions of the country will follow the feedback expected from the pilot program that is taking place in Benishangul-Gumuz Region.

Finally, I would like to thank ESD for organizing a conference on the theme which the government has already recognized to be the focus of its attention in the education sector in the next 5 years. I am also hopeful that all participants of this conference will be able to take home helpful lessons and experiences from the next three conference days.

Thank you.

## 3. The Ethiopian ECCE Policy Framework

Presenter: Ato Hawaz Haileyesus, FDRE Ministry of Education

Ato Hawaz's presentation was on early education policy framework and the place of early education in ESDP V. The full text of power point presentation made by Ato Hawaz is presented as follows.

**1) Before the introduction of the ECCE policy framework**

- ECCE was left to the private sector.
- ECCE service was confined to urban areas and big cities
- Nearly, all children started primary school without attending preschool
- Government's role was limited to curriculum development, supervision and training of teachers
- The service was not holistic

**2) Rationale for developing policy framework**

- Ensuring all children reach their potential through a holistic approach. •

Giving adequate services backed by an overarching policy framework •

Ethiopia's signing of the Convention for the right of the child.

- The world's recognition of the significance of preschool in Jomtien, Thailand (1990) and Ethiopia's recognition of the importance of ECCE in accelerating the attainment of EFA and the MDGs.

**3) Goals and Strategic Objectives**

- promoting early stimulation for better future life
- enhancing quality, access, and equitable distribution of services
- Protecting young children from any form of abuse and harmful practices

- Promoting and strengthening partnerships and collaborations among stakeholders for effective service delivery

**4) Basic pillars for ECCE services Delivery**

a) Parental education - aimed at awareness raising and empowering parents about child rearing and responsibility starting from conception of a new child

b) Health and Early Stimulation Program - Prenatal-3+ years

c) Preschool - KG (4 to 6+years)

d) Non-Formal school readiness - Child - to - Child; " O-class' and Accelerated School Readiness

**5) Strategic issues include need for**

a) advocacy on the importance of ECCE

b) a coherent government structure

c) increased access to education and Equity in distribution

d) enhanced quality-service provision

e) enhanced child protection from abuse and harmful practices.

**6) ECCE in the ESDP V:**

It is believed that ECCE help improve the quality of education since it:

- Improves student learning in later grades,
- Reduces dropout and repetition rates
- Contributes to improved efficiency and effectiveness in the system.

According to the presenter, a target of Gross Enrolment Rate was set at 80% for the [ESDP V] plan period. Different modalities were thought to be used to reach the 80% target. The framework also had space for non-government sector's participation in the delivery of kindergarten, in particular. In connection with teachers, the need for a large number of teachers trained at a diploma level was indicated in the framework. To achieve this, it is stipulated in the framework that the threeyear pre-primary teacher training program would continue to be strengthened and expanded to reach all colleges of teacher education in the country.

Regarding the preschool modalities, cost-effective modalities such as Kindergarten, O-class, Childto-Child and Accelerated School Readiness Programmers were suggested to be used. The need for an increase in the supply of targeted early grade literacy and numeracy materials by 50%, and the need for strengthening school-parent/community relationship were other areas of focus of the presenter's speech. The existence of proper coordination among ministries

(i.e., MoE, MoH, AND MoWCA) was also noted to be an important issue in the provision of quality early childhood education.

Questions, mostly seeking clarification from the presenter, were raised from the participants and answers were given.

## 4. ESD Early Childhood Care and Education Initiatives

Presenter: Ato Daniel H/gebriel

Education for Sustainable Development's pre-school intervention is one type of civil society support to the implementation of the ECCE policy. Education for Sustainable Development has been implementing pre-school education in North Shewa Zone of Amhara Regional State. This pictorial presentation is meant to introduce the ESD pre-school intervention 'As-Is' so that the audience can learn what has been done and how has it been done.

✦ ESD established 4 model centers in two districts of North Showa zone in 2008/9. The model centers have classrooms, playgrounds, life skills corners and offices for preschool teachers. The centers have also pit latrines for boys and girls. See below.


✦ Following the evaluation of the ECCE model center initiatives and the development of the Ethiopian ECCE policy framework, strategies and guidelines in 2010, ESD made a strategic shift to school-based ECCE centers approach in 2011. Accordingly, ESD established 48 school-based ECCE centers in collaboration with the primary schools in five districts of North Shoazone. The centers have classrooms organized with corners, playgrounds and pit latrines. The following pictures show this.






**The next table (Table 1) reveals the number of preschool centers established, preschoolers admitted to the model and school based centers and number of preschool teachers**

| Academic year | No of Centers | No of preschoolers | | | No of preschool teachers | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | M | F | T | M | F | T |
| 2008/9 | 4 | 85 | 73 | 158 | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| 2010 | 4 | 176 | 178 | 354 | 0 | 12 | 12 |
| 2011 | 4 | 189 | 198 | 387 | 0 | 12 | 12 |
| 2012 | 48 | 1059 | 1085 | 2144 | 1 | 44 | 45 |
| 2013 | 48 | 1153 | 1165 | 2318 | 1 | 44 | 45 |
| 2014 | 48 | 1251 | 1875 | 3126 | 1 | 59 | 60 |
| 2015 | 19 | 526 | 536 | 1062 | 1 | 18 | 19 |
| 2016 | 19 | 615 | 650 | 1265 | 1 | 44 | 45 |
| Total | | 5054 | 5760 | 10814 | | | |

ESD has expanded the ECCE interventions from school-based to community-based/ village- based centers since 2013. Accordingly, 10 community based ECCE centers have been established in four districts in collaboration with the village communities who are settled far away from the primary schools. The major community based ECCE interventions include renovation of community initiated centers, equipping the centers with learning and playing materials and facilities, training preschool teachers, establishing and training ECCE committee.

Community initiated ECCE center class-room before renovation

Community initiated ECCE center class-room after renovation

**Table2: Number of preschool centers established, preschoolers admitted to the community based centers and preschool teachers**

| Academic year | No of Outreach Centers | No of preschoolers | | | No of preschool teachers | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | M | F | T | M | F | T |
| 2013 | 3 | 48 | 37 | 85 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2014 | 7 | 75 | 82 | 157 | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| 2015 | 10 | 81 | 110 | 191 | | 10 | 10 |
| 2016 | 10 | 89 | 112 | 201 | | 10 | 10 |
| Total | | 293 | 341 | 634 | | | |

✦ ESD established and trained ECCE committees at zone, district, school/ community levels in the intervention areas. The major roles of the committees were:

- Redefining and contextualizing ECCE standards
- Facilitating employment and salary of preschool teachers
- Mobilizing stakeholders
- Monitoring and evaluating the ECCE interventions

✦ ESD established Pedagogical Resource Center (PRC) in Debrebrhan. The pedagogical center serves as the ECCE resource center in the zone. The major achievements of the center are:

Equipping the center with working equipment and tools, and Training and assigning PRC technicians. The major functions of the PRC are:

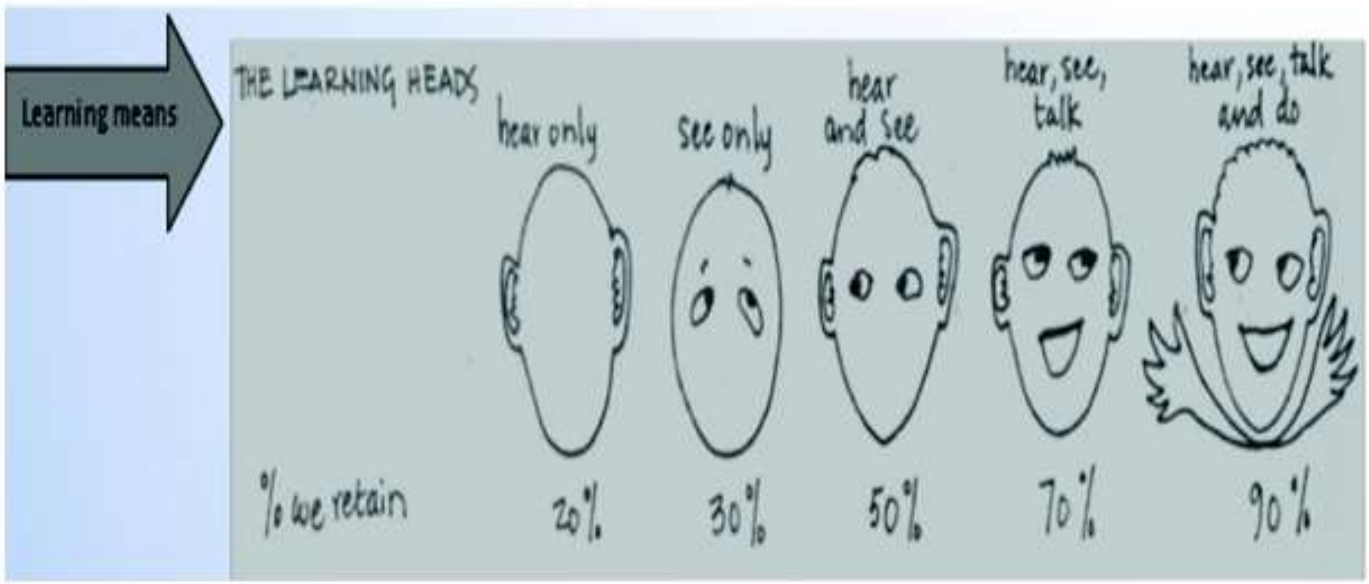
- Creating links between the center and the schools
- Producing and distributing Playing, Learning and Teaching Materials (PLTMs) to the ECCE centers
- Training preschool teachers on production and use of PLTMs
- Serving the surrounding schools as a learning center

- Conducting competitions among the surrounding schools on production of PLTMs and awarding the winners [as strategy to promote contextualization of the primary school curriculum]

**Partial Views of the Pedagogical Resource Center**

Integrating instructional media into playing, learning and teaching, as shown in the diagrams below, enhances the interaction and relationship between means of learning and the level of retention.

**Instructional Media, Learning and Retention**




✦ Implementing the ECCE Curriculum

- implementing the curriculum prepared by the Regional Education Bureau -

setting weekly ECCE activity programs based on the curriculum

- undertaking continuous assessment of preschoolers based on the developmental aspects/ tasks

✦ Preschool Teachers training

Induction trainings have been given to newly employed preschool teachers. One of the induction sessions is shown below.

**Induction Session in Progress**

- In-service trainings have been given to preschool teachers based on identified and prioritized gaps

**In-service training Sessions**

- Sponsorship is given to preschool teachers to attend summer (in-service training) program and up-grade themselves to a certificate level. For example, 26 preschool teachers received the first round of in-service training at Debrebirhan College of Teachers Education in the Kiremt [summer] of 2015.

✦ Integrating nutrition and WASH into Preschool Education

Nutrition

Training parents on child nutrition.

Distributing lunch boxes to preschool parents

(This helps parents to send their children with meals to the centers.)

✦ WASH



✦ **Community's and parents' contributions to ECCE interventions -**

Labor and materials for classroom construction and renovation

- Constructing pit latrine
- Building fences around the ECCE centers
- Celebrating preschool parents' days


✦ **Sustainability**

- MOUs among the stakeholders from the beginning
- Organizing forums for experience sharing among the centers
- Preparing ECCE's exit strategies (handing them over to the government and the communities)

✦ **Conclusion**

Education for sustainable development has accumulated experiences in ECCE interventions over the last seven years. It has also learned useful lessons from international and local organizations and practices. I hope that the next three conference-days will be a forum for you ladies and gentlemen to exchange experiences and learn from each other's best practices as well as from the reports of the findings of related studies planned to be presented at the conference.

Thank you.

**Comments on the presentation**

"In order to expand community based preschool education we have to first create awareness among the community members. Proper awareness creation among the rural community on preschool education has resulted in positive replies from the community. For example, there are cases in which some community members provided land while others helped preschool centers located in their localities with other local resources." (An expert from DEC)

## 5. Research papers on ECCE

### 5.1 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ethiopia: Past experiences, Present Practices and Future Directions.

**By Dr. Fantahun Admas**

#### 5.1.1 Introduction

World wide experience shows that in the past children of the nobilities were sent to schools with the intention of sharpening their abilities and preparing them for future leadership. In Ethiopia also sons of the affluent went to church/Quran school while the large majority of children of the peasant did not have the opportunity. Their parents needed them to help on the farm (Girma, 1967). In the modern era, however, education has come to be formally recognized as a human right for every individual, irrespective of the individual's ability, disability, age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and other forms of differences. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (UNCRC, 1989), education has been given a fair attention. This means that the right every child has to education has been recognized. The declaration of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) strengthened education of young children as a right and as a means of development (UNESCO, 1990; UN, 2000).

These days, educating children is understood as a human right and a wise investment too (ILO, 2012). The immense contribution that early childhood care and education (ECCE) makes to the holistic development of children has now widely been recognized, and its importance has been convincingly proved. For example, children with low socioeconomic status (SES) who have attended preschools benefited from long- and short-term effects of early childhood care and education (e.g., Caughy, DiPietro & Strobino, 1994). Needless to say, early Childhood Care and Education, is thus, important for children in Africa in particular, as they are in most cases economically disadvantaged. Children in Africa deserve intense interventions in the form of ECCE (Garcia, Virata& Dunkelberg, 2008). Poverty has, for long, been a formidable challenge in the continent(Pence, Evans, & Garcia, 2008). The Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of absolute child poverty in the world. In some parts of the world, ECCE is known to have started over a hundred years ago. In Ethiopia-a sub-Saharan African country, however, it has been given attention only over the last few decades (Demeke, 2007; Woldehanna, 2011).

#### 5.1.2 Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia: Past Experiences

Ethiopia has been practicing Church, Quran and tradition-based early childhood education for centuries (Hailegebriel, 2015). In particular, Church and Quran schools are recognized as the bases for modern education in the country.

As a traditional custodian of the nation's culture and politics, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is believed to have played a vital role in the Ethiopian education system. It provided education from elementary level at local

churches to university level at monasteries. The education focuses on the lower level of reading and writing and the higher level of theology, philosophy, history, computation, poetry and music (Teshome, 1979). The Ethiopian Orthodox Church educated children by developing an elaborated education system which is comparable to the Hebrew, Greek and Chinese systems (Girma, 1967). The Church education system contains four successive stages: Nibab Bet (school of reading), Zema Bet (school of Music), Qinne Bet (school of poetry) and Metsihaf Bet (school of books/text translation).

Children were introduced to Church education at the age of 4 years, 4 months and 4 days. The ritual ceremony required of children the first day they went to church school was going round the church three times. This ritual is believed to make them intelligent and quick learners (Hailegebrie, 2015). Likewise, the Quran school in Ethiopia has also tremendously contributed to education of Ethiopian children. The school has an established system of education with two major divisions. In the first division, children are taught Arabic letters and reading the Quran; and in the second, they are taught Islamic law, Arabic grammar and commentaries (Hailegebreil, 2015).In the effort made to modernize Ethiopia and fill the limitations of the traditional church education for international politics, the first modern primary education was opened in Addis Ababa in 1908 (Teshome, 1979; Pankhurst, 1974). The major aim of education of the time was to master different languages, the proficiency of which was important for the country's independence (Tekeste, 1996; Adane, 1993; Pankhurst, 1974).

The introduction of modern education is only a century old phenomenon. A little earlier than the first modern primary school, preschool was established in Dire Dawa to serve the French consultants who had worked in the railroad building (Demeke, 2007). Later on, following the opening of the government primary schools and community schools, preschools such as the German school, the English school and Lycee Gebre Mariam were opened attached to the primary schools to serve children of the well-to-do and government officials in Addis Ababa.

The beginning of preschool as a general community service began in the 1960s with a few pilot projects at Addis Ababa, Debrebirhan, DebreZeit, Awassa and Asmara under the Ministry of National Community Development and Social Affairs (MNCDSA). The schools were run by foreign nationals; namely, Swedes and American Peace Corps volunteers (Tirussew et al., 2009). Despite the fact that modern education was introduced to the country in the first decade of the 20$^{th}$ C, there were only 77 kindergartens in the country towards the end of the Imperial regime- this means the progress made in this regard in over 50 years was negligible.

The socialist regime which held power from 1974-1991 did justice to early childhood education. Socialism, in principle, recognizes the equality of human beings and the participation of women in all fronts. This necessitated liberating mothers from routine childcare activities and household chores. The need to

open daycare centers and kindergartens in the country, both in the rural and urban settings, apparently, arose from the country's recognition of this socialist principle.According to Tirusew, et al., (2009), Demeke, (2007), and Hoot et al., (2004), a notable expansion of early childhood education was observed following the 1974 socialist revolution in the country. Between the years 1974 and 1990, 912 preschools were reported to have been opened in the country. The socialist regime that came to power in 1974 tried to give emphasis to education for all children. The regime had, apparently, concern for education of citizens. The embarking of the nation-wide Literacy Campaign in 1979 was evidence of the regime's commitment to eradicating illiteracy. Hundreds of regular schools were also opened, and this led to a massive increase in the number of students who went to schools. The initiatives taken by the regime led to a rapid increase in the literacy rate in the country (Seyoum, 1996).

The coming into existence of an independent commission called 'The Ethiopian Children's Commission' in the year 1980 was another commendable step taken by the then socialist regime in Ethiopian. The Commission was entrusted with the responsibility of caring for and educating children. The Commission is believed to have accomplished numerous tasks until the 1991 change in the system of the government in the country (Demeke, 2007).

## Government Commitment and Community Participation in the Past

The first significant step in the introduction of modern education to the country was a school established at Menelik's palace. This happened despite objections by the Church, especially by the Egyptian pope who was heading the Church at the time and by the noblemen (Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012). Empress Zewditu proclaimed in 1909 that parents had to send their children to school to learn reading and writing. Failure to comply with this, according to the source cited here, led to a-50 Birr fine at the time. (Ayalew, 2000; cited in Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012). However, the community did not positively view modern education, fearing that their children would change their religion. As a result, except some enlightened parents, not many sent their children even to the limited schools available at the time.

Emperor Haile Silassie strengthened Minilik's move and opened new schools in his name and also empowered other landlords to open schools (Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012). Significant efforts had been made during the Imperial regime to expand schools in the country. However, early childhood care and education had been given little or no attention at all.

By comparison, the Derg regime was better in addressing early childhood care and education. The commitment of the Derg regime to preschool was seen in the development of the first national preschool curriculum, preschool teacher training, and the opening of different departments that are pertinent to

preschool education program in the Ministry of Education. The opening of preschools in different parts of Ethiopia demanded the development of curriculum and training for preschool teachers. The first preschool curriculum was developed by ICDR in 1980. Following this, centers to train preschool teachers were opened in collaboration with the UNICEF. The formation of farmers' cooperatives in rural areas opened a chance for children of the farmers in rural Ethiopia to go to preschools. Notable farmer's cooperatives such as Yetnura had well-established preschools in the rural part of Ethiopia (Simret, personal communication, November 13, 2015). Training teachers for early childhood education was almost nonexistent in the Imperial era but during the Derg regime, as shown earlier, some promising strides were taken.

## Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia: Present Practices

The present practices of early childhood education in Ethiopia focus on the practices, achievements, opportunities and challenges since 1991 to the present. This period is marked by the formulation of education and training policy in 1994.

## Government commitment and Community Participation in the Present

The Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. In order to address the right to education, the government committed itself to the international and national declarations, policies, legislations and strategies. Following the Education and Training Policy issued in 1994, the Government began exerting efforts to educate children in the country. As part of the effort made, the government committed itself to the international and national declarations, policies, legislations and strategies. Education for All (UNESCO, 1990; 2000) and the United Nation's Millennium declaration on Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2000) are worth mentioning among the international declarations to which the country committed herself. The international declarations and frameworks support the importance of early childhood education and encourage investment on children. Also, locally, the country developed a series of different Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs I II III IV ).Early Childhood Care and Education program was given the required policy support in ESDP IV (Mulugeta, 2015).

Early childhood education does not seem to have received sufficient attention in the 1994 Education and Training Policy (Demeke, 2007), however. Apparently, the sector was left to the private, international and national NGOs, missionaries, communities, religious institutions and other organizations (Hoot et al., 2004). As a result, urban areas have a relatively high concentration of early childhood education centers owned by different institutions (Szente, Hoot &Tadesse, 2007), mainly private investors. However, not many parents can afford to pay for their children to attend early childhood education (Hoot et al., 2004). The preschools also do not appear to be able to offer education of a good quali-

ty. Poor preparation of personnel, inadequate provision of facilities and materials, absence of supervision and follow up by the government and lack of professionalism can be mentioned as factors for the low quality of private preschool centers (Tirussew et al., 2009; Hoot et al., 2004; Fantahun, 2013).

More recently, however, with the support obtained from UNICEF, the government has drafted:

a) strategic operational plan and guidelines for early childhood care and education (MoE, MoH & MoWA, 2010a);and b) national policy framework for early childhood care and education (MoE, MoH & MoWA, 2010b) to inform the implementation of ECCE.

## Preschool Approaches

Government, private owners, NGOs, communities, and faith-based organizations have played a significant part in opening preschools and educating children (MoE, 2015; Woldehanna, 2011). However, the enrollment of young children in early childhood care and education is still negligible compared to the number of children eligible for the program in the country. This means that many preschool-age children are still out of preschool in Ethiopia.

In the effort made to accept as many children sent to preschools as possible, in addition to kindergarten, the government has recently introduced a Child-to-Child program and O-Classes. Both O-Class and child-to-child programs are annexed to primary schools. Preschool children stay in the programs for one year before they join primary schools. In the program, older children in grades, for example, five and six, support preschool children in their neighborhood classes. Evidence from the Ministry of Education (2015) indicates that there were 2.4 million children in ECCE in the 2013/14 academic year nationwide. It should be noted that from among the 2.4 million children in ECCE modalities, over 1.5 million children went to "O" classes, 0.5 million to child-to-child programs and less than half a million went to Kindergartens. Even this made the national coverage of preschool-age children only 6.6% (MoE, 2015).

O-classes and child-to-child approaches are implemented to fill the gap in the area where kindergartens are not available. But the most benefiting approach could be the Kindergarten. As noted in ESDP V (ESDP V, 2015), children who had kindergarten experience were better prepared to start regular school than children who had passed through one year of O-class or Child-to-Child programs. An excerpt extracted from ESDP V (see below) on the pattern of ECCE expansion clearly reveals the government's concern about pre-primary education.

> …If expansion of pre-primary education continues to follow the same pattern across regions and kindergartens remain accessible almost exclusively to those in urban areas, it may only increase educational advantages for children from urban areas whose families are able to send them to kindergarten (ESDP V, 2015, p.14).

## Curriculum Content and Pedagogy

The curriculum content and Pedagogy of preschools in Ethiopia tend to leave much to be desired yet. The preschool curriculum in most preschools emphasizes academic subjects such as mathematics, English and science. It does not give sufficient attention to games and play activities. Children's exposure to real world experiences is limited in most preschools. According to ACEI guidelines (AECI, 2011), early childhood curriculum includes experiences, interactions and routines that occur in each child's day in a group setting in preschools. The curriculum, the guidelines state, should reflect the educational philosophy and provide guidelines for educators and caregivers. Children are the center of the curriculum, and their learning should be based on the experiences appropriate to their developmental levels and cultures. A quality early childhood curriculum, then, focuses on the whole child and considers the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development (ACEI, 2011) of the child. The curriculum in most preschools seems to have been designed to meet the academic needs of the preschool owners or parents more than meeting the children's needs.

Apart from the curriculum content, the teaching methods are important elements of quality of a preschool education program. However, according to Tirussewet et al., (2009), the teachers' understanding of the pedagogical principles in teaching very young children is low. The degree to which both the teaching and the curriculum content are developmentally appropriate to the age of the children to be served is a major determinant of program quality. It is possible to drill children up until they can correctly recite pieces of information such as the alphabet or numbers. However, children's responses to rote tasks do not reflect their real understanding of the needed information.

Teachers in the observed preschool use highly structured, teacher-centered lessons. Children are also expected to conform to rigid expectations. Teachers direct all activities in the center. They decide what activities children will do and when. In the classroom, children are expected to either sit down, listen to or watch the teacher doing something, or they do paper work for a long time. In connection with this, Bredekamp (1996) notes that inappropriate instructional practices such as counting, circling an item on a worksheet, memorizing facts, watching demonstrations, and drilling with flash cards promote isolated skill development.

Another challenge for most preschools in relation to curriculum was parents' unrealistic needs. Parents need their children to speak English and preschools try to meet these needs by teaching children English at the expense of other learning experiences. Parents compare one preschool with the other preschool in terms of the children's ability to speak English. This parental interest seemed to influence the curriculum contents of most preschools and the quality itself. Bredekamp (1996) suggested that children need to play at this preschool age more than they need to learn academics.

Assessment of children focused on paper-based examinations and rankings which cannot tell the child's holistic developmental progress as a function of preschool participation. In ACEI (2011), children are encouraged to undergo self-evaluation about their strengths and weaknesses. Comprehensive evaluation of the program's effectiveness in meeting local, regional, national and international standards for excellence in early childhood education is not familiar to preschool teachers. It is also not a tradition for preschools themselves either. In most preschools, children take quizzes and sit for exams. Other than such exam-based quarterly academic evaluation, the children's holistic development and performance are not evaluated together with the preschools' program evaluation. However, it is necessary to point out that assessment (if properly applied) is an important component of preschool education in order to address the holistic development of the child.

## ECE educators and caregivers

From personal observations, it is possible to state that teachers of young children exhibit personal characteristics demonstrated in caring, acceptance, sensitivity, empathy and warmth to children. Preschool children are often heard referring to their female teachers as 'Miss' and performing what their teachers tell them to do, such as washing their hands. The respect preschool children seem to have for their teachers appears to be as much as the respect they have for own biological parents.

**Partnership with Families and Communities**

Observation shows that there is a low collaboration between preschool and the community. In addition, in many preschools, the program policies are not clearly communicated, if at all they existed. Wherever they existed, the program policies did not clearly stipulate what is expected of the families and communities in the education of preschool children. Guidelines are not, in most preschools, established on how parents could participate in the preschool program.

Parents need to access information about the education of their children and aspects of child development. However, preschools rarely made information available to families about child development, health care, nutrition and other related issues. In some cases, preschools do not allow parents and community representatives to observe and evaluate their preschool activities before their children are formally registered in the preschools.

Preschools are owned by private owners or by the government. Because of this, issues of planning, managing and evaluating the process of a given preschool are the job of either the private owner or the government. Collaboration for program planning, management and evaluation is, thus, not established between families and community representatives in almost all preschools. Preschool owners' and teachers' believe that the teaching-learning process is largely the responsibility of the preschools. On the other hand, parents also assume that once they send their children to preschools, it is the teacher's responsibility to do the teaching. In

general, parental involvement in the teaching/learning process of preschool children is undoubtedly important for the quality of preschool education, but this is a missing link in most preschools in the country.

### Children with Special Needs

These days, there is a strong need for children with special needs to be part of the preschool education system. This happened following the coming into existence of universal principles such as the Right for Education and Education for All. These principles stress that all children attend schools. Children with special needs deserve special support and service during their stay in preschool and beyond to ensure their optimal growth. Contrary to expectations, however, children with disabilities and other special needs children do not seem to have access to preschool education.

### Linkage, transition to and retention in primary school

One of the benefits of preschool education is preparing children for the primary education. Studies show that children who had proper preschool attendance showed better performance in schools than those who did not have the experience. To link the preschool education to the primary school and make the transition for children smooth, the preschool education and the primary education need to have vertical relationship. In this regard, the child-to-child and O-class approaches make children better prepared for the primary education. In connection with the curriculum of the primary school, however, proper care needs to be taken to stop repeating the contents that children have learned in the preschool. Unwisely repeated lesson content decreases the children's interest to learn. Observation does not show much difference in lessons prepared for children in preschool and for those in the first grade of the primary school.

## 5.1.3 Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia: Future Directions

### Objectives and Goals of Early Childhood Education

Our past and present experience of early childhood education and care should help us design the future of this field. In this connection, questions such as Why do parents send their children to preschools in general? What is expected from the government and other stakeholders to make preschools available and accessible to all? etc. should be taken into account.

Early childhood education is the first formal schooling experience for children. It is where children learn the foundational skills for future school success (Ray & Smith, 2010). Melhuish and Petrogiannis (2006) and Boocock (1995) argue that the need to send children to early childhood education centers arose from maternal employment, reduced family size and absence of extended family support. According to this view, parents send their children to preschool because there is no one at home to look after them. Other educators such as Barnett (2008), on the other hand, argue that the objective of sending children to preschools should not be only because there is nobody at home to look after them. The need to send children to preschool, in Barnett's

(2008)opinion, arises from the crucial role that early childhood education has to play in the development of children. Evidence from studies in the field reveals that a child who experienced early childhood education benefited more from developmental outcomes compared to a child without such an experience. Early childhood education, Barnett's (2008) contends, should be provided to advance the development of 'normal' children or to mitigate the developmental problems of children at risk.

Answering the question why parents send their children to preschool and the importance of ECCE to Ethiopian children may need a comprehensive study. Until then or even then, however, we can agree that there is a need to direct the objectives of the early childhood education in Ethiopia towards the development of the whole child. To this effect, the Ethiopian government has drafted a strategic operational plan and guidelines for early childhood care and education (MoE, MoH & MoWA, 2010a). The goal of the strategic operational plan is stated as: "Early stimulation and early start in life for all children from prenatal to the age of seven enhances the quality, accessibility and equitable distribution of services for children through more efficient partnerships and capacity building programs." (MoE, MoH & MoWA, 2010a page 6).

The guidelines for early childhood care and education embrace the four pillars: parental education, health and early stimulation, preschools, and non-formal school readiness. The guidelines indicate that the target populations of preschool programs are children of four to six (plus) years old. Among others, environment and physical space, outdoor play equipment, preschool curriculum, teachers and assistant teachers, are listed in the guidelines as essential component of the curriculum for the preschool stage (MoE, MoH & MoWA, 2010a, pp. 53-61).

There is also a national policy framework for early childhood education (MoE, MoH & MoWA, 2010b) to inform the implementation of ECCE. Among the objectives and goals of ECCE, provision of high quality early childhood education and promotion of children's holistic development are worth mentioning. It has been evident that the disadvantaged children can even benefit more than the advantaged ones from preschool experience if the ECCE is of a high quality (Boocock, 1995). Other authorities in the field, such as Rosenthal(2003) stated (a) promoting the survival, health and overall well-being of children; and (b) socializing children into adults who adapt well to their eco-cultural situation to be among the goals of preschools that are shared by different cultures and economy. Nonetheless, cultural communities differ in their specific goals for the development and education of their children. These goals vary in accordance with the community's views of the relations among people and of the skills required for adaptation to life in the community. The vision of ECCE in Ethiopia considers the culture of the country along with "ensuring all children the right to a healthy start in life, nurture in a safe, caring and stimulating environment and develop to their fullest potential" (MoE, MoH & MoWA, 2010a; (MoE, MoH & MoWA, 2010b).

What should Quality of Early Childhood Education be?

Quality in early childhood programs is a relative concept due to differences in values, philosophies, beliefs, needs and definitions. As a result, the global dimensions of quality may be reflected in very different types of practices that reflect cultural differences (Bruchial & Cryer, 2003). Therefore, quality has been continually redefined depending on the ways the components have been operationalised (Fontaine et al., 2006).

The attempt to define the quality of early childhood education has attracted enormous research interest for over a decade, but no single agreement seems to have been reached yet (Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2010). Research in recent years has challenged the widely held assumption that there exists a single universal model of high quality early childhood education. The competing argument is that the definition of "quality" is a derivative of cultural values and developmental goals of each cultural community (Rosenthal, 2003). Moss and Dahlberg (2008), in particular, argue that quality is a language of evaluation that fails to recognize a multilingual world. In this way, Moss & Dahlberg, argue that the word 'quality', as it stands, denies the possibility of the existence of other languages. Quality is not a neutral concept that is devoid of values or assumptions (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008).

The list of factors to consider in the decision to be made about quality in early education appears to be endless since, of recent, researchers have started to take a growing interest in the area.

Findings of studies by Rentzou & Sakellariou (2010) consider interaction, group size, adult to child ratio and early childhood educators' level of education as important indices of quality of early childhood education. Others, including Fontaine et al., (2006), list indoor and outdoor space, curriculum and activities, teacher and child interactions, etc., as early education quality indicators. Yet others mention developmental appropriateness as a key component of quality in early childhood education. The popular National Association for Education of Young Children uses this notion in evaluation and accreditation of program quality in the US (Lee & Walsh, 2004).

### a) Philosophies and Goals in ECCE Program

Early childhood education program needs to have its own philosophy that dictates the goals to be achieved and the services to be provided. Similarly, it is important for a program that serves preschool children to have a clearly articulated philosophy and goals that value children, families, cultures, and communities. The philosophy should be communicated to the public, reflected in daily practices, and revised periodically. The philosophy should reflect advances in understanding about how young children grow and learn. Each nation is required to design a policy framework that will address the provision of a variety of culturally responsive programs to meet the needs of all children and families (Jalongo et al., 2004). In line with this, Ethiopia has formulated a policy framework that considers families and children in the parental education, health and stimulation of very young children, education of kindergartners and non-formal school readiness (MoE, MoH & MoWA, 2010b).

A quality early childhood program begins with an underlying theory or statement of fundamental beliefs—beliefs about why it exists, what it will accomplish, and how it will serve all the children and the families involved in the program. The philosophy establishes a framework for program decisions and provides direction for goal-setting and program implementation. In order for children to move smoothly from home to preschool and through the early elementary grades, there must be similarities in goals, philosophy and expectations for children, families, and staff. Any special needs of children should also be provided for within the early childhood setting to reduce the fragmentation of services and facilitate inclusion.

## Physical Environments

Jalongo and her colleagues advise that the physical environment of the preschool setting be arranged in a way that it can address the safety, physical well-being, intellectual stimulation, and social support for children. Materials should also be closely related to the desired outcomes of quality preschool education that realizes the full development of children. The quality of space and materials will be dictated by cultural, geographic, and economic realities. Environments for young children should always reflect concern for all aspects of child development: physical, intellectual, social and emotional. Space and materials for preschoolers should enhance sociability. Space and materials used with children should also support their emotional safety and show respect for the familiar and cultural experiences of the child. It is important for the transition of children from home to school not to be so drastic as to cause psychological and emotional stress by imposing rigid schedules on children. Preschools are also recommended to be free from situations such as long periods of children's sedentary activities and activities that place intense academic pressure on children (Jalongo et al., 2004).

The ECCE environment is a whole program formed by physical, psychological and social elements. Environments for young children need to be physically safe, socially enhancing, emotionally nurturing, and intellectually stimulating. This may include built facilities, immediate neighborhood, and psychological and social settings. In planning the ECCE environment, both functional and aesthetic aspects should be taken into account. A high quality environment encourages children to play, explore, move, act and express themselves in many different ways (Stakes, 2004). A good learning environment guides children's curiosity, interest and motivation. It promotes their activities and self-direction. It provides children with opportunities to play games, do joyful activities, and learn language (NBE, 2000).

Planning of spaces can be used as a means to promote interactions in peer groups of different kinds and sizes and between children and educators. A well- designed ECCE environment promotes activities in small groups where everyone has an opportunity to take part in discussions and interactions (Stakes, 2004). Quality physical environment promotes positive relationships among chil-

dren and adults. It encourages each child's sense of individual worth and belongingness as part of a community. It also fosters each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member. Warm, sensitive, and responsive relationships help children feel secure. The safe and secure environments built by positive relationships help children thrive physically. Children also benefit much from each other's' experiences. They learn how to get along with others too (NAEYC, 2009).

### a) Pedagogy and Curriculum

A quality preschool education program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development. A well-planned and written curriculum serves teachers as a guide. It helps them work together and balance different activities and approaches to maximize children's learning and development. The curriculum includes goals for the content that children are learning, planned activities linked to these goals, daily schedules and routines, and materials to be used (NAEYC, 2009).

The curriculum in a quality early childhood program is thoughtfully planned. It has evidence-based framework that is consistent with the goals of the program and with standards established by the program's governing body. It is consistent with and supports reasonable expectations for young children's development and learning and is culturally and linguistically responsive (MSBE, 2005).

Developmental appropriateness is a widely used indicator of quality in education for young children. It draws attention to the ways children's play and learning can be promoted. It also indicates directions in which useful approach to teaching can be adapted/adopted by caregivers. Some sources of these features of the definition of developmental appropriateness were:

(a) Practices based on universal, predictable sequences of growth, and change,

(b) Teachers' responses to the age of the child and individuality in terms of growth pattern, personality, learning style and family background, (c) The understanding that children learn best through play that is self-initiated, self-directed and self-chosen,

(d) The understanding of teacher's roles.

Preschool teachers, among others, provide a rich variety of activities and materials. They support the children's play, and talk with children about their play (Woodhead, 1998).A preschool program should not put children under pressure to perform tasks beyond their understanding. There is no room for making attempts to please adults by untimely preparing children for competitive, task-driven culture that awaits them. The learning experiences offered to children should respect their natural, playful style of learning. Imposing rigid and tedious approaches that force children to master academic skills is not advisable (Jalongo et al, 2004). The primary focus of the curriculum is to emphasize the importance of developing the whole child, in four learning domains: social/emotional, physical, creative expression/aesthetic, and cognitive development (e.g., language and literacy development, and mathematical and scientific thinking).

Opportunities for art, science, social studies, dramatic plays and outdoor plays are provided daily. The curriculum should be designed to connect with and support developmentally appropriate expectations for children's development and learning in the years beyond the preschool program (MSBE, 2005).

Learning in preschool education involves an active and goal-oriented process. This is based on previous knowledge structure. It often involves the development of problem solving skill. Teaching in preschool should be based on playful activities stemming from children's individual development level. This promotes children's linguistic development and potential to learn new things(NBE, 2001). Knowledge cannot be directly transferred to children through teaching, but children themselves will generate new ideas on the basis of previously adopted ideas and new information. Teachers support learning and guide children to become conscious of their own learning. They enable children to believe that they can influence their own success in learning.

### c) Basic Needs and Special Needs

Younger children need more care and attention from adults (Stakes, 2004). Their overall needs -such as need for food, health care and clothing - are to be met and parents and preschools should address these needs. Children with identified special needs should also be part of the preschool program together with their non-special needs peers. This helps them to socialize easily (Jalongo et al, 2004).Special support in preschool education is needed to be given to children whose conditions for development - growth and learning - have been affected by illness, disability or reduced functional ability. Special support includes the necessary measures related to early detection, prevention and rehabilitation (NBE, 2001).

### d) Respect for Families and Communities

Children throughout the world are deeply affected by problems such as poverty, lack of social or political regard for their well-being and the inability of the families to cope with increasing social and economic demands. Preschool programs need to be aware of the realities faced by parents and families who are working long hours and struggling to meet the basic needs of their children (Jalongo et al, 2004).

Preschool teachers have a key role to play in sharing the day-to-day education and care of the young children with their parents. The partnership requires mutual, continuous and committed interaction in all matters concerning the child. Partnership in ECEC is built on the child's needs, the realization of the child's best interests and rights (Stakes, 2004). Early childhood care and education partnership combines the knowledge and experiences of parents and ECEC staff, both of which are important influences in the child's life. Some parents mistakenly believe that a difficult and academic-oriented curriculum is good for very young children. Difficult and academic-oriented curriculum, according to such a mistaken belief, promotes the children's development and learning, and their sharing of responsibilities (Chan & Chan, 2003).

Parents or other guardians have the primary educational responsibility for their children.

This means that creating a trusting relationship between preschool staff and parents has a very important role for children's satisfaction, growth and learning (NBE, 2001). Parents' involvement and participation in children's learning at home and school enhances parents' understanding of preschool programs and the rationale underlying the need for the program (Chan & Chan, 2003).

### e) Teachers and Staff

Competent staff, according to Stakes (2004), is a central resource for early childhood education. The core competence areas for preschool teaching include knowledge of:

- the history/ philosophy of early childhood education;
- Child growth, development and learning;
- Child health, safety and nutrition;
- Child home-school-community relation ships;
- Curriculum development and implementa tion;
- Appropriate assessment of practices and program management, and
- Professionalism and skills of collaboration.

Well-trained care givers understand children's needs and concerns (Jalongo et al., 2004). Preschool teachers need to be committed, sensitive and be able to react to the child's feelings and needs. Preschool teachers encourage children to act independently, and this is believed to make children feel good about being able to do things while they also receive support when they need it (Stakes, 2004).

Early childhood programs are staffed by individuals with differing levels of education and experience as required by the program's administering agency. All instructional staff, support staff, and non-paid personnel (e.g., parents, volunteers) should have training, experience, and access to staff development activities that are commensurate with their responsibilities. In addition, strong and knowledgeable administrative leadership is a key component of an effective early childhood program (MSBE, 2005).

A high-quality workforce is critical for the provision of high-quality early childhood education. To achieve a high-quality workforce and empower early childhood practitioners, the professional qualification requirements must be raised to the level expected of primary teachers. Salaries should commensurate with qualifications to encourage upgrading of professional qualifications and increase the attractiveness of the profession to potential recruits (Chan & Chan, 2003).

Warm personal relationships provide a basis for learning. The educators' commitment to the education and learning situation manifests itself as sensitivity to children's feelings and emotional well-being. The educators are expected to listen to children and give them opportunities to take initiatives. They are also expected to encourage children to decide on their activities, explore possibilities, draw conclusions and express their thoughts (Stakes, 2004).

### Program Evaluation

Quality preschool programs are administered, supervised, and monitored by educational leaders who are fully cognizant of child development and who are advocates of excellence in curricu-

lum and pedagogy. Assessment of preschool program should be comprehensive, on-going, and longitudinal. Meaningful assessment of preschool programs takes a value added perspective by examining the genuine contributions made, both at the program-wide level and at the level of each particular child and family. High quality assessment practices are integrated into the basic program design based on direct observation and samples of children's work. The practices should also be respectful of the whole child - physical, social, intellectual and emotional( Jalongo et al., 2004).

Evaluation of early childhood programs should be based on an in-depth understanding of the dynamic program processes and diverse stakeholders' perspectives on program quality. Evaluation should challenge and expand the dominant perspectives on early childhood program quality. Early childhood program evaluation has primarily addressed questions of outcomes obtained and the standards complied with. Much evaluation of early childhood programs has been devoted to measuring outcomes, especially cognitive outcomes of participating children and families (Lee & Walsh, 2005).

Certain ways of program evaluation, notably measuring outcomes or monitoring program compliance with given standards, are expected and encouraged, if not demanded. Contemporary program evaluation has reverted to emphasizing program outcomes and 'scientific' rigor in its evaluation methods. Program evaluation has long been methodology oriented. Scientific evaluation appears to be viewed by some as being able to provide clear answers to whether programs work and are worthy of public investment (Lee & Walsh, 2004). Contextually sensitive, reliable, and meaningful assessment tools for young children can be found easily, however.

Given the complexity of factors, most programs require assistance from outside organizations in order to develop and implement credible program evaluation and continuous quality improvement systems. Infrastructure is needed to coordinate evaluation activities for various types of programs. Providing training on methods of program evaluation, and supporting individual programs in developing continuous quality improvement systems also need infrastructure (Azzi-Lessing, 2009).

Tests and examinations should have no place in the assessment of children in kindergartens. If indications of children's developmental progress in various domains have to be obtained, this should be achieved through the use of criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced assessment. Variations in the rate of development and individual differences in abilities tend to be huge during early childhood years and comparison with peers does not yield meaningful information (Chan & Chan, 2003). Assessment of a child's progress in development against developmental milestones is more useful.

### 5.1.4 Conclusion

The past experiences of early childhood care and education in Ethiopia is mainly related to Church and Quran education. Lessons should be learned from this rich experience in planning the future of early childhood care and education. The in-

digenous knowledge from Church and Quran schools could be the basis for the future quality preschool education. The expansion of ECCE during the Dergregime was one of the golden times of preschool education and lessons should be learned from that as well. Besides the expansion, the period could be recognized for developing the first preschool curriculum and the opening of preschool teacher training institutes.

Ratification of UN and UNICIEF declarations and development of national Education and Training Policy, along with the Education Sector Development Strategies (ESDPs),makes the present situation conducive to improve the quality of ECCE in the future. Reforming ECCE requires designing and using a careful plan that takes into account key elements of high quality indicators in preschool program.

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**Comments on the research presentation**

- "Church and Quran education is the basis for formal education in the country. We know that a child takes many things from his family to formal school. This means that what we learn from our family supports us in our learning in school. In my opinion, we need to find ways we can incorporate indigenous and traditional knowledge into the formal education process." (An Instructor from Addis Ababa University)
- "I think we have a problem of maintaining indigenous knowledge. We normally rely on outside knowledge more than we do on our own. It is time we gave due attention to what is purely our own." (An MoE Officer)
- "We have to discuss broad issues to get something important for effective implementation of ECCE program. As presented earlier, there are 5 quality aspects in preschool program. We also have similar tools called ESD QUAT in the ESD program. The tool has its own dimensions and details. I think we need to think of contextualizing when we attempt to implement early child education program. (An Expert from Partner Organization of ESD)"
- "The study is timely and a good input for the MOE to prepare curriculum. When we prepare curriculum we normally consider contextualization." (An MoE Officer)

## 5.2. Interactions in Early Childhood Care and Education Centers: Implications for Preschool Teachers' Professional Development

**By Dr. Girma Lemma**

### 5.2.1. Background

The far-reaching benefit of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to children in particular and the society at large has been given substantial space in the psychological and educational literature. During the past decades, there has been a steady increase in scientific evidence that establishes the importance of early years for later development (Currier, 2001; Essa, 1999; Kagan and Neuman, 2005; Lynch, 2006/07; Ramey & Ramey, 2005; Flett, 2008; Blatchford & Woodhead, 2009; Woodhead, Ames, Vennam, & Workineh, 2009). Research findings show the importance of early care and education, family support, and innovative educational curriculum in preparing high risk and normal children for initial success in school. Analysis of national data from 47 Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries showed a strong association between average primary completion rate, lower repetition rate and preprimary enrollment (Pence, Evans, &Garcia, 2008).

The contribution of Early Childhood Education to Sustainable Development is getting attention by practitioners and policy makers. Early childhood education lays a sound intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundation for development and lifelong learning.It has an enormous potential in fostering values, attitudes, skills and behaviors that support sustainable development (UNESO,2008).A look into the efforts made and achievements recorded in the Ethiopian educational system in the last two decades shows that early childhood care and education has been given a marginal attention. Despite the Dakar framework for action by EFA to prioritize the expansion and improvement of early childhood care and education centers (Woodhead Ames, Vennam, & Wiorkineh,2009),the sector is underdeveloped still, and inadequately supported by government policies.

In 2013/14 the number of children in ECCE centers was about 2.4 million. Gross enrolment ratio reached 33.7% nationally and the share of girls was 48%. Some regions have very recently started to run preschool classes (commonly known as "O" class programs) within the primary school premise. It is true that the current mainstreaming of ECD into the first cycle of primary education is reported to have increased enrollment tremendously. In terms of access, the approach has drawn thousands of underprivileged preschool children to the centers. This state-supported pre-primary education, though its modality is not explicitly stated, can have multiple positive effects on Ethiopian children. On the one hand, it paves the way for smooth transition to formal education by bridging the gap between children that had access to the service and the ones that are denied this opportunity. The program is also expected to increase school success by reducing the high dropout rate observed in the first cycle of the primary education. Whether or not this resource sharing scheme yields a better result in preparing young children for the formal school

system is, however, open to question.

A promising beginning for Ethiopian children is the endorsement of the National Policy Framework for Early childhood Care and Education policy document(2010). The policy document might be a triggering factor for ECCE to take off.

The modalities of early childhood care and education program vary considerably. They range from the long standing traditional Church and Quran early childhood education to modern preschool programs crafted along the Euro-American types. They vary considerably in terms of structure as well as process. Whether or not these centers are operating along Rousseau's lazes-faire approach or Froebel's notion of supervised play or Montessori's modality of environmental exploration is not clear.

The Ministry of Education has set standards for preschool centers in terms of the size of the compound and classrooms, facilities, offices, toilets, dining rooms, and first aid kits. However, according to UNESCO Cluster Office, Addis Ababa (2006) report, none of the preschools visited by the office met the standard set by the Ministry of Education. The newly developed curriculum (MOE, 2002), is a means towards standardization of programs. However, exaggerated differences in structural and process aspects in the centers may obviously result in significant variations among children in terms of immediate learning experiences and lasting cognitive and social outcomes.

### a) Theoretical Framework

Munton, Mooney and Rowland (1995; Cited in Kwan,) identified three components of child-care environment. (1) Structure (e.g. teaching materials, environmental safety, expenditure, opening hours), (2) processes within the environment (e.g. stimulation of children, parent staff interactions, child-staff ratio, links between childcare and local schools), and (3) the outcome of what is offered (e.g. language/ cognitive developmental optimum achieved, comparable cost of child care, safety and equal opportunities for all children). One of the strengths of this conceptualization of quality is that it gives a direction as to what questions can be asked about the features and how they can be assessed.

Research has shown the importance of building mutually satisfying relationship between children and adults. This has been documented by early and recent theories of child development (Osofsky & Thompson, 2009). Teacher-child closeness was positively associated with kindergarteners' self-directedness, and greater competency behavior such as assertive social skills, and peer sociability at the end of first grade (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Palermo et al., 2007; Howes, et al., 2008). Classrooms and play grounds in early childhood care and education centers are developmental niches in which preschool children's developmental outcomes are configured through triad interactions involving children, care givers and parents.

The quality of child-care giver interaction, which is an essential component in the psycho-social development of preschool children, has minimally been researched in Ethiopian. This is what makes the need to work aggressively on quality of interaction in Early Child-

hood Care and Education Centers pressing, The National Policy Framework for Early childhood Care and Education (NPF, 2010) also suggests the necessity to promote quality child-care giver interaction both at home and school settings.

### b) Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the contexts that shape the quality of interaction in Early Childhood Care and Education Centers in Addis Ababa. The theoretical discourse that shaped the study was fusion of developmental theories that articulate the importance of interaction and attachment for the holistic development of preschool children.

### c) Research questions

- What is the status of interaction in ECCE centers? (i.e., triad interactions involving children, care givers and parents)
- What specific classroom and center-based instances can be attributed to quality care giver child interaction?
- What is the implication of quality of interaction in ECCE centers for preschool teachers' professional development?

## 5.2.2. METHOD

### Design of the Study

The method of inquiry used in this study is a mixed research design in which the quantitative and qualitative approaches complement each other and help to understand different dimensions of interactions in ECCE centers. According to Hauser-Cram et al., (2009), the exclusive use of quantitative measurement would narrow our understanding of the phenomena and, hence, the complementary quantitative-qualitative approach appears to be the default design in ECCE researches.

### Sampling

This research was conducted in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. Five sub cities were selected on purposive sampling technique. Centers were chosen using availability sampling techniques. At 95% confidence interval with 5% marginal error, the expected sample size for centers is seventy.

### Instrument

Quality of care giver-child interaction was assessed by the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) (Arnett,1989). Unlike rating instruments such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) that examines program quality across a wide range of dimensions, the CIS is better suited to make an "in-depth, process oriented observations" (Meisel, & Burnett, 2006).The CIS assesses the interactions of the lead teacher with preschool children in the kindergarten classrooms, using a scale of 1 (Not at all true), 2 (Somewhat true), 3 (Quite a bit true), and 4 (Very much true). The original instrument includes 26 items factor analyzed into four subscales: Positive Relationship, Punitiveness, Permissiveness, and Detachment. Internal consistency and inter-rater reliability of 0.65 or higher have been reported.

## 5.2.3. RESULTS

### a) The status of care giver child interaction in ECCE centers

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Care giver Interaction Sub-scales (N=70)**

| Dependent variables | Minimum | Maxi-mum | Mean | Std. Devi-ation | Skewness | | Kurtosis | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | statistics | .Std Error | statis-tics | .Std Error |
| Positive Interac-tion | 1.50 | 4.00 | 3.1500 | 63560. | 765.- | 287. | 358.- | 566. |
| Punitiveness | 1.44 | 4.00 | 3.5444 | 51290. | -1.655 | 287. | 3.413 | 566. |
| Detachment | 1.75 | 4.00 | 3.2000 | 80825. | 488.- | 287. | -1.318 | 566. |
| Permissiveness | 1.00 | 4.00 | 3.0810 | 75381. | 605.- | 287. | 050.- | 566. |

The mean value for the overall CIS care giver-child interaction scale was 3.29 with a standard deviation of 0.5289. The overall mean values computed from the CIS scale ranged between 1.73 and 3.96. An inspection of the separate mean values for the observed classrooms indicated that 43% of the observed classrooms were below this overall mean value. This figure is somehow nearer to the median value which apportions the distribution into two halves, suggesting that the quality of care giver interaction was below the average value in almost half of the observed classrooms.

Forty one percent of the observed classrooms fell below this mean score, indicating that care giver child interactions in the ECCE centers was at a moderate level. It may be more informative to see the nature of interaction with regard to each item in the subscales. The lowest mean value for item ten was (M= 2.59). This item reads “When talking to children kneels, bends, or sits at their level to establish better eye contact”. This suggests that one- to- one face interaction between care givers and the children was low and care givers tended to be less-responsive to the children’s cues. The mean scores for items 17, and 19 that read “pays positive attention to the children as individuals” and “encourages children to exhibit pro-social behavior” were found to be below the average score for the scale. This suggests that care givers’ behavior in terms of availing choices and opportunities for self development was not adequate.

A close inspection of the distribution of the mean values for the punitveness subscale showed that 44% were below this mean value. The mean value for item 12 which reads ”Places high value on obedience” was found to be 3.31. This is the lowest item mean value in the subscale. The next lower item mean values were for items 18,11, and 13 that read ”Expects children to stay calmly”, “Is critical of the children”, and “ Speaks with irritation to the children”(M=3.35, M =3.40, and M = 3.47 respectively )

The overall mean value for the detachment subscale was found to be 3.2. Item 21 that reads “Spends considerable time in activity not involving interaction with children” and item 23 that reads” Does not supervise the children

very closely" had mean values of M= 3.09 and M =3.11 respectively).

The permissiveness subscale was composed of three items. The overall mean value for the observed classrooms regarding this subscale was 3.08. The mean value for item 26 that reads "Exercises firmness when necessary" was 2.76. This value is towards the lower end of the scale. This suggests that care givers tend to be permissive and hesitant in setting and practicing clear and concise rules.

It may be interesting to see the distribution of mean values in relation to center types. A score of two and below is taken as low quality interaction. A score of three and above is taken as high quality care giver interaction. If the points between these two ranges are extrapolated, 2.5 is the midpoint. Classrooms whose mean values fell below this midpoint were taken as having low quality care giver child interaction profile. Analysis of the frequency distributions of mean values showed that 12 (32%) were in the 'Private' and 'Other' categories. A relatively more number of private centers had mean values below this midpoint. The lowest mean values (M =1.50) and (M =1.00) were recorded for the government center types in the positive interaction and punitiveness subscales. Similarly, the lowest mean values (M=1.44 for the positive interaction subscale, M =1.75 for the detachment subscale) were recorded in the 'Private' and 'Other' center types.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Selected Items in the Caregiver Interaction Scale**

| Item No | CIS ITEMS | Mean |
|---|---|---|
| | **Sub-scale Positive Interaction** | |
| 10 | When talking to children, kneels, bends or sits at their level to es-.tablish better eye contact | 2.59 |
| | **Subscale Punitiveness** | |
| 11 | Is critical of the children | 3.40 |
| 12 | Places high value on obedience | 3.31 |
| 13 | .Speaks with irritation or hostility to the children | 3.47 |
| 17 | .Seems to prohibit many of the things the children want to do | 3.03 |
| 18 | Expects the children to exercise self-control: e.g., to be undisruptive .in group provider-led activities; to be able to stand in line calmly | 3.35 |
| 19 | .Seems unnecessarily harsh when scolding or prohibiting children | 2.99 |
| | **Subscale Detachment** | |
| 21 | Spends considerable time in activity not involving interaction with .the children | 3.09 |
| 23 | Doesn't supervise the children very closely | 3.11 |
| | **Subscale permissiveness** | |
| 26 | Exercises firmness when necessary | 2.76 |

b) Specific classroom and center-based instances that can be attributed to quality care giver-child interaction

At the end of the CIS scale three open- ended questions were developed and administered to capture qualitative data on contexts in which ECCE programs were run, on classroom situations and care givers' and children's overall behavior during their course of interaction. Case report was also included in the analysis to have an in-depth understanding of the situation that prevailed in the centers and the extent to which these circumstances promoted positive interaction between children, care givers and parents. The overall approach to collecting and analyzing the qualitative data was based on the assumption that the natural setting is the direct source of data. The approach focused on describing events in the process of care giver-child interaction in multiple settings rather than focusing on the outcomes resulting from this interaction. The data obtained from field notes taken throughout the data collection phase complemented the qualitative data obtained through the open-ended questions.

### i) Care giver behavioral repertories related to quality caregiver-child interactions

Naturalistic observation is complex. The use of such descriptive words and phrases in observational studies helps us to filter and decide the incidence of specific instances in a particular context and setting. These behavioral instances captured during care giver-children interactions are thematically categorized along the four subscales; Positive Interaction, Punitiveness, Detachment and Permissiveness dimensions.

**Instances of positive interaction**

- Posting names of top students of the week on classroom walls and displaying their work
- Posting names of best performing group leaders on classroom walls and displaying their work
- Assigning children to take multiple responsibilities;
- Attempts care givers were making to know details about children's profile;
- Care givers hugging and kissing of children and their playing with them;

**Instances of punitive behavior**

- Placing high value on obedience, for example, remarks such as ' Don't talk', ' Cross your hands on your chest,' etc.;
- Expecting overt perfection like negotiating for unrealistic discipline;
- Humiliating a child by posing a question, for example, "Who is fat in this class?"
- Using verbal insults such as Askeyami , (Amharic term for 'ugly')

**Instances of detachment**

- Denying students eye contact with a sense of disappointment;
- Denying children with disability proper attention;
- Using more paper and pencil interaction than verbal interaction;
- Giving more attention to routine activities than identifying the missing elements in the cognitive and social development;
- Not showing interest to solve children's problem, and throwing remarks such as "Go home and ask your father or mother," at them

**Instances of permissive behavior**

- Leaving students unattended to during break time. Not fewer than 80% of the children spend the break time unsupervised;
- Refraining themselves from calming students when they disturbance,
- Watching children without actually making any meaningful interaction;

### ii) Description of the contexts in which ECCE programs function

The contexts for the observation brought a number of different scenarios which had substantial meanings in terms of caregiver-child interactions. Some of the scenarios enhanced affective feelings and reciprocities between caregivers and children while others had negative implications for children's development. Contexts vary with respect to center types; private, government or faith-based center. Scenario varied with respect to time of observation, before the beginning of classrooms, while classrooms were in progress, or meal times. Specific context that impacted care giver child interaction was identified during observation sessions and the overall scene and content is described below based on field notes taken during observations.

**Devotion time**

Regardless of race (in the cases where foreigners care and teach in some of the private centers), ethnicity, religion, sex, and other background characteristics eye catching episodes were performed during devotion time. Devotion time is the peak, pinnacle, high momentum context in the interaction process. The situation during devotion time was moving in a kind of ascending order, following a chain of events. The moving scenario in simple terms was that actions that pack in a little time occurred first, while actions that were more complex came next, as they were pushed by the preceding event and this accelerated the momentum, leading to the climax of the care giver child interaction. The true meaning of care giver-child-interaction gets meaning here. Devotion time was not simply a set of acts. Rather, it was a well-planned and systematically structured event with clear objectives. It started with simple episodes and gradually transcended into a more complex set of events and movements that promoted children's holistic development in the area of cognitive, affective and social domains. A designated care giver took the lead. In almost all cases the designation of responsibility went to the younger ones. All care givers, however, were part of the scene. They were not bystanders. The scene started with greetings. In some non-secular centers it started with daily prayers. Monday is typically the day on which nails and hair are checked. Nails and hair should be cut on weekends. Uniforms are washed on weekends. Children look neat and tidy on Mondays. Care givers supervise the hygienic status of children. A child who fails to meet the standard for that particular day is advised and instructed. Care givers were so careful that they never ridiculed or harmed a child's ego in these events. That was followed by brief age-appropriate physical exercise. The general pattern of the flag ceremony was same across the different center types.

## Child-Object interaction and Child-to-child Interaction

### iii) Description about the classrooms observed

The first two or three sessions in the classrooms continued with similar zeal and positive emotions, paralleling the devotion time. Class size, physical set up, organization and display of learning and stimulating materials, etc. vary from center to center. Despite these variations, one could observe classroom situations that could promote care giver-child interaction and child-object-interactions. All have the potential to contribute to children's development in the cognitive and social domains.

Movement is directly related to space. Movement entails interaction by narrowing physical and social distances. Classrooms of the average size promote easy flow of information and one-to-one interaction. Bigger class sizes constrict movement. Small sized classrooms (something like 3x3) accommodated as many as 30children. Even in bigger classrooms,3 or 4 students sit at a single bench. Some classrooms were awkward. Not only are they small, but their geometrical shape also doesn't allow easy student interaction and movement.

The small sized classrooms forced care givers to confine themselves to a small front space found close to the blackboard. Space limitation led to fixed sitting arrangement and unidirectional eye and body gestures. This resulted in a minimal or no opportunity for children to interact with the environment in multiple ways and directions.

Fixed sitting arrangement is likely to impede interaction. It impeded, for example, complete visualization of the environment. Hence, child-to-child interaction in the observed classrooms was seriously jeopardized. Large class sizes limited the opportunity for individual care and support. These were some of the important things captured during classroom observations. The presence of child-sized seats opened the opportunity for restructuring and configuring the classroom setting in such a way that it promoted care giver-to-child and child-to-child interactions. Moveable chairs, as opposed to the fixed ones, did not create territorial claim among children. It is interesting to observe blackboards fixed to the rear doors of some of the centers. This facilitated effective use of the physical environment and furnishings. Care givers were seen to effectively transit children from on activity to the other without taking too much time on one activity. Many of the newly opened government owned "O-classrooms' function within the premises of the formal school system. They seem to have similar classroom sitting arrangements with the formal classrooms. Such stereotyped classroom configurations, with their inappropriate child-sized physical settings, paralleled the formal school classrooms.

Overall, all the classrooms observed were filled with stimulating learning and teaching materials that ranged from teacher-made to the children-made ones. Many of the observed classrooms had pictures, drawings, numbers, letters, real objects, etc. on their walls.

One could see that care givers have made maximum effort to make their classroom environment stimulating and child friendly to enhance interactions. Most of the materials in the classrooms were paper products. Objects of three dimensions were scanty, however. This could create on the observers the impression that the interaction is more between paper and pencil than it is between human beings. Many centers in the capital claim that their programs are aligned to the Montessori Child Education Philosophy. None of the classrooms observed, however, had sand trays, clays, or objects children could work with easily. Availability of learning and teaching materials is one good thing. Accessing and effectively utilizing them is, in fact, another thing.

Care givers tended to stick to the traditional chalk-talk method. Because of this, the learning materials displayed on the wall did not seem to serve much. The children did not have access to the materials. Whenever and wherever materials displayed in the classroom were used, their use was through mediators, i.e., the care giver. In most cases the interaction was formal and the care giver acted as an authoritative figure. Child-environment link was subordinate to this relational process. In the observed classrooms, no care giver was observed attempting to create interaction between the children and the materials posted on the walls or those displayed on tables. The interactions between care givers and children and child-to-material (whenever this happened) were all confined to sedentary style without the involvement of any physical movement from one place to another.

### iv) Care Givers' Profile

The care givers included in this study were female care givers. The traditional stereotyped outlook that segregated males and females into different professions is typically evidenced in preschool teaching career in the Ethiopian context. Traditionally, care giving is females' exclusive responsibility. Teaching, especially teaching in the kindergartens where consistent care and follow up is needed, seems to be ascribed to females. The sad news is that, mainly, if not wholly, female students who fail to join higher education institutions are the front liners to join this 'profession'. The low profile of care givers (in terms of academic background, mainly) is exemplified in their low language skills and lack of conceptual understanding in certain areas of the cognitive domain. During classroom observations, it was possible to capture spelling mistakes, grammatical inconsistencies, and other related errors that can be attributed to their low educational background.

A number of care givers' behaviors in the cognitive domain did not seem proper in terms of capacitating children's language and communication skills. These include improper pronunciations, incorrect grammar and usage, spelling and conceptual errors.

In the observed centers much emphasis was given to the development of numeric and literacy with little or no attention to other aspects of development such as pro-social behavior and communication skills. Classroom sessions were didactically structured in a rigid and fixed manner like that of the formal school system. Lesson plans were prepared in exactly the same way in the formal school system,

allowing little or no room for activities other than the development of literacy and numeric abilities. In almost all cases teachers wanted children to show their excellence and brevity in reading, writing and computational skills. The transition from one activity to the next was slow and does not transcend in a natural pace. Hence, children were forced to stay idle detached from any meaningful interaction with care givers and peers which ultimately perpetuated disciplinary problems in the classrooms.

Except in rare cases care givers were found to be highly affectionate with a sense of close attachment with children. Physical punishment seems exception than a rule to discipline children. The traditional view that children should show strict adherence to adults' obligations seems to wither away gradually. One could witness those traditional adults' views, beliefs and attitudes toward children are getting changed. Spare the rod and spoil the child principle seems obsolete. Care givers in their interaction with children did not make use of the strategy of maintaining discipline with a rod of iron. Punishment especially physical punishment is becoming absurd in disciplining children and its relevance is becoming outmoded in the ECCE centers. This is a new perspective in child rearing practices in the Ethiopian society. A number of instances observed during data collection process substantiated the affectionate relationship between care givers and ECCE children.

### v) Care giver-parent interaction

In some centers care giver child interaction begins outside the main gate. Care givers in their white gowns on, queue up just outside the main gate. By the time the child is dropped by his/her parent or any significant person, he/she is expected to greet every care giver awaiting there. Care givers kiss, hug, and make brief communication with the child about his/her home, Mom and Dad. This is also an important moment for care giver-parent interactions. Brief communications are exchanged. The status of the child is reported by the care givers in that brief moment. If there is something that worries parents, it is at this particular moment that opinions are exchanged and temporary solutions suggested. The situation demonstrated that it is impossible to rule out the importance of supportive relationship between parents and care givers to meet the physical and psychological needs of children. The two-way flow of information between the home environment and ECCE centers is essential for the child's development.

The media of information exchange between the two micro-systems in the context of ECCE setting have different forms and structure. Among others, communication letters, home visits, semester-based conferences, student performance transcripts and signatures of parents on children's exercise books can be mentioned. Care giver-parent exchange of information while children are dropped and picked, and summative evaluations at the end of academic year are avenues in maintaining network between ECCE centers and parents. The effectiveness of each of the medium of communications rested upon the choices made by parents and initiatives taken by the centers to facilitate the linkage.

### vi) Case report

Observational case study technique within the general mixed research approach was chosen to move from broad exploratory observations to more directed data collection and analysis of activities and situations in selected center types. This approach helped to identify particular center types with atypical properties in program implementation. Case analyses of one center, named 'Good Neighbors' is described below.

'Good Neighbors' started operating in Ethiopia in 1997. In the capital, the project is running a multifaceted program in Lideta, Yeka, and Gullele sub cities. The Lideta Family Development Program (LFDP) is an integrated holistic program focusing on empowerment of families and the local community to become self-reliant. Good Neighbors preschool center (MELKAM ATSEDE HITSANAT) functioning in Lideta Sub city is meant to support preschoolers and children who have been deprived of their educational rights due to poverty. The project in this sub city has devised a multifaceted strategy of promoting the physical and emotional development of children growing in the vicinity.

Melkam Child Center (MCC) is one of the preschool centers functioning under the auspices of Good Neighbors. A two-day visit at the center enabled the researcher to capture important features of the center and its specialty in terms of the holistic development of children. MCC is providing service for 120 children with 30 children per classroom.
In line with the general mission of Good Neighbors, this charity-based center provides multifaceted service to children and their parents. The children served in MCC are drawn from the poorest families, i.e., single parents (sometimes labeled as semi-orphans) that lead their livelihood as daily laborers or beggars. Orphans were also beneficiaries of services in this center. Some of these children have been once engaged in begging at Lideta Saint Merry Orthodox Church gate located adjacent to the preschool center.

The children in MCC are not only provided with educational services but also with educational materials and school uniforms. Children cared for and educated in this center get lunch and breakfast services from Monday to Friday including fruits, milk and vegetables. Good Neighbors (i.e., MCC) provides medical services to the children and health-related education to parents to reduce child and maternal mortality. As part of the overall multifaceted program, children in MCC have the privilege of getting medical care and complete annual medical checkups.

What is interesting about this center is that it is strongly networked with parents. At least two home visits are made every month by social workers working in the center. During the visits communications are made with parents on the psycho social well-being of the children. Social workers in the center advise parents on several issues related to children and devise strategies to enhance their coping mechanisms. The center has different extra-curricular activities to enhance children's cognitive and emotional development. Field trips, recreation programs, get-together events, library readings, computer literacy programs are some of the provisions in the center.

Good Neighbors (MCC) provides vocational education and training to parents with the conviction that family-based capacity building strategy can break the cycle of poverty in the child's home environment. Accordingly, mothers of these children are supported to be engaged in income generating activities and made beneficiaries of relief aid. By the time data were collected in the center, mothers of some children, for example, were undergoing training in sewing, and management of micro-businesses.

After completing the preschool program, children are transited to nearby primary schools. The MCC center still continues supporting the children like, in terms, for example, of covering their registration fees, buying school uniforms and educational materials, and provision of medical checkups. Tutorial classes are also arranged for these children. Interestingly, these children seem to love the center more than they love their home. Even if they were transferred to the nearby primary schools, they still maintain strong attachment with MCC. Graduation from the MCC center is not welcomed by many children. The transition to the formal school is not marked by a feeling of achievement and fulfillment. Many of the benefits they enjoy as preschool children are now curtailed. They are forced to lead their life with meager resources available at home. A follow-up report of the educational achievements of children enrolled in MCC center has shown that 5-7 children were able to join higher education institutions.

### 5.2.4. Implications for ECCE Teachers' professional Development

The knowledge, skills, and practices of early childhood educators are important factors in determining how much a young child learns and how prepared that child is for the formal school system. Early childhood educators are expected to provide richer educational experiences that engage children of varying abilities and background. In one study, when all teachers' qualifications met Pre-Kindergarten standards, years of teaching experience was related to a greater exposure to literacy activities for children in a classroom (Phillips, Gormley and Lowenstein, 2009). Early childhood professional development initiatives involve enhancing children's learning across cognitive, communicative, social-emotional, and behavioral domains (Guskey, 2000, 2001). Such outcomes are the ultimate measure of successful professional development initiatives. Benefits of professional development efforts that target knowledge, skills, and dispositions may be expected in teachers' interactions with children or families, teachers' efforts to structure meaningful learning environments in the home or classroom, teachers' use of specific curricula or teaching strategies for a particular group of children, or teachers' use of a host of other specific behaviors or meaningful targets(Susan M. Sheridan, Carolyn Pope Edwards, Christine A. Marvin, and Lisa L. Knoche,2009)

The rapid expansion of pre-primary education, particularly O-Classes, raises concerns regarding the quality program offered to children (Education Sector Development Program V , 2015/16 - 2019/20). Presently, primary school

teachers are using available periods to provide O-Class instruction. The placement of primary school teachers to teach in the O classes is simply a make shift positioning. School communities are directly hiring untrained teachers to provide instruction to children in O-Classes. These innovations are well-received, but they have drawbacks in terms of quality and appropriateness of instruction, which are not generally apparent in the kindergartens. As indicated in the Education Sector Development Program V,the government has devised a strategy for capacity building to produce competent and skilled man power through different professional development programs in the coming five years. To promote quality interactions in ECCE centers, plausible strategies have to be devised so that the 21st Century Early Childhood Teachers discharge their responsibilities adequately.

These days' classroom environments are changing dramatically. Teachers across the globe are making maximum effort to equip children with the skills needed for success in the 21st century world. In order to achieve these goals, teachers must foster learning environments that encourage critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, global awareness, and social responsibility. This is possible when there is interaction between adults and children on the basis of reciprocity. A variety of strategies have been put in place that would enable early childhood teachers to shape their classrooms to prepare children for the future ahead. One of the strategies is implementing Cooperative Learning Structures. Effective teachers are increasingly using a student-centered approach, gradually abandoning teacher-centered instruction. Cooperative learning provides ample opportunities for children's engagement in classrooms by encouraging interaction among the students themselves. The teacher, rather than focusing on one student at a time, encourages children to discuss problems of common interest in groups, thus maximizing the level of participation. Hence, there is a shift from a one-man show, to reciprocation that turns classrooms into live environments.

The other strategy is differentiated Instruction. Teachers can tailor learning experiences to individual student needs in the classroom. This requires matching of learning styles of the individual child with group instructions. Allowing children to select activities based on areas of interest is a way to differentiate instruction. Offering choices creates the urge to learn. Small-group discussions are one way to meet the needs of learners in large class settings.

Another most important strategy is setting of common goal. This calls for active involvement of children in planning and executing plans. Research shows this is an effective way to encourage children to take responsibility for their own learning. This can be achieved through two-way interaction with children about their progress in specific areas, providing frequent feedback and encouraging children for self-reflection.

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## Comments and questions raised on the research presentation

The first question the presenter was asked was to explain whether the study was conducted in government and non-government education institutes. The person asked said training that focused on the children's physical, mental, social/ emotional and psychological development had been given to teachers. He admitted that there was a quality limitation, and commented that the study did not address the reality of the national context.

In response, the presenter said the study was conducted in Addis Ababa. He remarked that preschool teachers were being trained. He mentioned the Amhara Region as an example where the number of colleges that trained preschool teachers had grown from seven to ten. Yet, he said, the coverage was not sufficient. He also mentioned the presence of policy, strategy and guidelines for preschool education. The main missing element, in the presenter's opinion, was interaction.

(MOE)

- «I suggest that government aggressively work on monitoring of preschool and primary education. One cannot say private sectors are irresponsible about educational quality without having any study-based evidence. Government involvement in preschool education is at its early stage. A lot remains still to be done. In order to mitigate turnover rate, it is important to think of teacher incentives, for example.» •
- «We have to think and relate children to the environment in which they live in order to realize a contextualized curriculum.»
- « Children should be allowed to touch and sense the teaching aids. ECCE intervention should be multidimensional i.e. we have to look at it in terms of physical, manpower and material aspects.»
- «When a teacher teaches there should be passion for the profession. Teachers need to be given awareness in this regard. »
- «Private preschool institutions' physical facility is, largely, based on residential areas. It may therefore be difficult to conclude that private preschools are better in many ways. Parents misconceive that their children are perfect in academics whenever the children manage to speak English well. This should not mislead parents in anyway. Teacher turnover is common in preschools. A mechanism that can handle this needs to be put in place somewhere in the sector.»

## 5.3. Pre-Primary Teacher Training Program in Kotebe College of Teacher Education: Challenges and Policy Implications

By Abunu Arega( PhD student)

Abstract: The objective of this study was to explore the challenges and policy implications of pre-primary teacher training program in Kotebe College of Teacher Education, Addis Ababa. The study analyzed the recent policy documents and major challenges that affected the progress of the training program. Qualitative case study was the approach used to explore the challenges in depth. Data were gathered from the Ministry of Education, Kotebe College of Teachers Education and Addis Ababa City Education Bureau. Interviews, classroom observations and document analysis were the instruments used for data collection. A few of the examples of factors noted in the study as factors that challenged the progress of the program were: shortage of trainers, financial and material constraints, limited involvement of the government, and the inconclusiveness of the criteria used to select the trainees. The study recommended the need for improvement of the quality of the training that is offered to preschool teachers.

Keywords: pre-primary education, preschool teacher training, training college

**Abbreviations**

CE Child Education
CEB City Education Bureau
ECE Early Childhood Education
EFA Education for All
ETEC Ethio-Education Consultants
ESDP Education Sector Development Program
ETP Education and Training Policy
KCTE Kotebe College of Teacher Education
PPE Preprimary Education
PPS Preprimary School
PPTT Preprimary Teacher Training
PPTTI Preprimary Teacher Training Institution
TGE Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TTC Teacher Training College

### 5.3.1. Introduction

a) Background of the Study

The Education and Training Policy (ETP) of Ethiopia that is currently in use was formulated in 1994. This policy addresses educational goals of the nation from preprimary education (PPE) through higher education. The policy document in general gives more attention to the education of primary grade children (1-8) (TGE, 1994). Thus, preparing a child for primary schooling requires providing quality pre-primary education. According to Khan (1993), the success of education given to a child depends upon the foundation laid during pre-school years. Khan rightly argued that children who learn fundamental skills in the early years can develop ways that are crucial to the success of their future education. Thus, one can understand that early childhood (EC) is a critical period that requires due attention and a great deal of investment.

Currently, pre-primary education (PPE) is greatly considered as the most vital area of human capital investment (Young, 2002). The Education and Training Policy in use has this to say in connection with pre-primary education: “Kindergarten will focus on all round development of a child in preparation for formal schooling” (TGE, 1994: 14). This indicates that

the provision of quality PPE is a crucial issue in the current development agenda in the education system in the country.

The provision and implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is entirely linked with the policy and strategy of the nation's education system. Studies indicated that the improvement in education policy resulted in significantly improved EC programs (Dowda, Pate, Trost, Almeida, & Sirard, 2004;Heckman, 2006). Thus, a high devotion to policy issues is required to establish high quality practices of ECE (Vargas-Baron, 2005). This, in its turn, requires having dependable knowledge in the ways policies influence practices. In this regard, Vargas-Baron (2005) remarks that policies influence practices by articulating regulations, accountability and allocation of resources. They also set structural frameworks and quality control mechanisms. This means that policy documents have a vital role to play in the determination of provision of quality PPE in general and teacher training in particular.

In addition, the ECE requires political emphasis during policy formulation and implementation. A high level of political support stimulates the accomplishment of the educational goals of ECE (UNESCO, 2007), and investing in EC requires a strong political commitment and cooperation(Doryan, Cautam, & Foege2002). However, the attention from the governments to the ECE is insufficient mainly due to lack of necessary resources (Garcia, Pence, and Euans, 2008). In particular, the teacher training program for pre-primary education does not appear to have been given adequate attention. This is the case in developing countries such as Ethiopia (ETEC, 2005), where there are no strategies for the expansion of pre-school teacher training centers. Evidence from the MoE (2006) shows that current resources are insufficient to provide even for basic primary education to Ethiopian children, and because of this, PPE and its teacher training program cannot get the attention they deserve at the moment. It is set as a standard that PPS teachers obtain a ten-month preschool teacher training certificate from teacher training institutes. However, shortage of both teacher training institutes and professional trainers has made the implementation of the program difficult.

The source of the problem in the implementation of this program appears to be linked to the absence of prioritization of programs. Early childhood education in Ethiopia is not a priority of the education sector. Undoubtedly, primary education is the priority of ETP to achieve the UPE/EFA goals. This, in its turn, depends on the provision of quality PPE. Pre-primary education is a foundation for the promotion of 'holistic' and well-balanced development of a child (UNESCO, 2006). Clearly, this makes prioritizing PPE a mandatory in schooling activities. Early childhood education is the first goal of Education For All. Achieving this goal requires providing quality teacher training programs. Needless to say, teachers are central in the process of education. Because of this, any attempt made to provide the best education should primarily focus on building the teacher's capacity.

In general, PPE lays the foundation of a child's knowledge, skills and rule of behavior. It pro-

vides a stimulating play environment for physical, intellectual, language, social and emotional development of the children. It is a great instrument to prepare children for primary education by emphasizing the holistic development of a child. This, in turn, needs designing policies and setting proper implementation strategies, including training sufficient and qualified teachers for pre-primary schools. To this end, this study was designed to explore the challenges that are currently facing preschool teachers training college located in Addis Ababa. (Kotebe College of Teacher Education is the only teacher training college that has preschool teachers training department in the city.)

### b) Statement of the Problem

Pre-school education program prepares children who are below the official school-going age for education in primary schools. As indicated in UNESCO (2006), the main objective of PPE is to ensure the all-round development of children and prepare them for formal schooling. In line with this, the Ethiopian government has committed itself to promoting PPE through policies that enhance investment in preprimary programs by the private sectors, NGOs, religious organizations and communities. The role of the government is limited to developing curriculum, training teachers and providing supervisory support ( MoE, 2010).

Early childhood is a critical period that requires due attention and a great deal of investment as well as visible cooperation of stakeholders (UNICEF, 2007). It is a sector that requires concerted efforts of different sectors and policies to work in collaboration for a common goal. The collaboration is not only the responsibility of the education sector and policy but many other sectors and policies, including health, social welfares and economic sectors are expected to pay a fair share to the endeavor (UNICEF, 2007). To this end, policy documents on health, education and social welfare articulate statements that uphold the protection, care, health and optimal development of children within their sphere of influence.

With a varying difference, each of these sectors plays a role in the development of a child. The essential thing needed is integration among the policies that govern the sectors. The health policy of Ethiopia (TGE, 1993) promotes and encourages the provision of care facilities and management of common childhood diseases (Art. 10.6); whereas, ETP proclaims the provision of ECE that focuses on all round-development and preparation of a child for formal education (Art. 3.2.1). Similarly, the Development and Social Welfare Policy (TGE, 1996) implements international and regional conventions. It also serves as a legal instrument for the rights of children (Art. 5.1.3).

In addition to the presence of loose integration among the policies, the provision of PPE in Ethiopia is facing challenges. For example, access is limited, and the quality of ECE is low (EFA, 2007). Furthermore, the shortage of PPS teachers with expected qualification has affected the provision of the program (MoE, 2010).Teacher training is one way of enhancing the quality and status of the profession of teaching. As noted by Meakelech(2002) “Even when a more relevant curriculum is developed, school outcomes and students’ performances

depend, to a great extent, on the availability of sufficient teachers and their energy, motivation, and talent." (p. 3). Thus, since teachers are key factors of success in education, teacher certification and program accreditation are helpful in preparing and qualifying pre-primary teachers. As stated in ESDP IV, however, one of the main challenges of the PPE sub-sector is the shortage in the average number of qualified PPS teachers (MoE, 2010).

The study conducted in 2008/09 indicates that the share of trained PPS teachers was 37 per cent. This shows that, despite the importance of quality in teachers' qualification, about 63 per cent of teachers are not trained to teach at the PPS level (Yisak and Camfield, 2009). In addition, both parents and teachers often complain about the shortage of teachers with appropriate qualifications. Furthermore, although the number of pre-primary schools is increasing every year, the government does not seem to keep pace in addressing the shortage of qualified teachers of young children (ibid). Clearly, the government has promised to play a critical role in policy development, curriculum designing, standard setting and training teachers (TGE, 1994). It should be noted, however, that pre-primary teacher training centers are not creating sufficient PPS teachers. On the other hand, the government's strategy of leaving the expansion of pre-school education and teacher training programs to private sector organizations, NGOs and community-based institutions was unsuccessful (Yisak and Camfield, 2009). The fact that all private teacher training centers, including the PPTIs, have currently ceased the training program confirms the failure of this strategy.

In addition to coverage and access, the PPE programs are challenged with the provision of poor quality education. Lack of preschool teachers is challenging the provision of a quality preschool education. Moreover, the quality of the existing services is low. This stems from poor preparation of teachers and poor provision of facilities (UNESCO, 2007). The government, however, appears to be reluctant in responding to the challenges(Hoot et al., 2004). Almost all private PPTTIs in Addis Ababa have been closed down and ceased offering training since 2009/10. This has created burden in Kotebe College of Teacher Education.

However, the general status of this Preprimary Teacher Training College (i.e., Kotebe College of Teacher Education,) in terms of providing the preschool teacher training program, is not known. Its current challenges, weaknesses and strengths as well as the intervention of the government in the provision of the training program are the areas focused on in this study. The study in general will attempt to answer the following basic questions.

1. What is the current status of pre-school teacher training program in Kotebe College of teacher education?
2. What challenges are facing the provision of preprimary teacher training program?
3. What interventions are required for effective implementation of the preprimary teacher training program?

### c) Objectives of the Study

In general, this study was aimed at:

- Identifying the current status of pre-school teacher training program in Kotebe College of

✦ Assessing the contributions of the stake-holders to an effective implementation of the pre-primary teacher training program.

### 5.3.2. Research Design and Methodology

A case study is the design employed in this study to identify the challenges faced in providing pre-school teacher training program in Kotebe College of teacher education. A case study takes interest in the detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. The method is used to examine contemporary real-life situations in order to provide basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods (Yin, 1984). It is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources.

#### a) Source of Data

A case study uses multiple data sources to enhance data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003).The Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa City Administration Education Bureau, and the department head of pre-school teacher training program in Kotebe College of teacher education are the bodies that are directly involved in the development and enhancement of pre-primary teacher training program and policy concerns. They are therefore the sources of the data used in present study.

In particular, preprimary teacher training experts at MoE, pre-school training program expert and teacher development coordinator from the Addis Ababa City Administration Education Bureau, and pre-school department head in the college participated in the study. A stratified purposive sampling technique was used in selecting this sample of respondents.

#### b) Data Gathering Instruments

The data gathering instruments employed in the study were document analysis, classroom observation and interview. Documents related to various policies and reports of program implementation strategies as well as documents on standards and procedures of the training program were reviewed. In addition, documents regarding statistical reports were consulted. Data on the status of conference s materials and teaching facilities were collected from the training college through observation. Structured and unstructured interviews were mainly used to collect relevant data from experts and from the department head of pre-school teacher training program in the College.

### 5.3.3. Thematic Analysis, Discussion and Conclusions

a) Thematic Analysis of the findings

The data used in this study have been analyzed thematically. In this section, discussions of common themes and sub topics that were derived from the description of the qualitative data will be reported.

#### i) Selection of the Trainees

The major issue related to selecting the trainees is the criteria employed during the admission of the trainees. The main criteria considered in the selection were the candidates' scores in the national examination and their grade $10^{th}$ or $12^{th}$school transcript. In this regard, data obtained from the respondent sampled from TTC showed the prevailing dis-

satisfaction with the selection criteria in use. The respondent had the opinion that the experience of candidates be considered in the selection process. Here is the excerpt taken from this respondent in this regard.

"Mostly … we (the department) suggest the use of a variety of methods to select the trainees, including work experience, age, entrance exams, medical exams, and discipline issues …." The respondent commented that the selection criteria in use were limited to the GPA and transcript results. These, according to the respondent's opinion, may be used as indicators of the trainees' relative performance to enter the training program. The respondent said the criteria in use made evaluating the interest, language proficiency as well as pictorial and hand writing abilities of the trainees difficult. The use of entrance exams, oral and written, appears to help better in the selection of candidates to join the training program, the respondent added.

On the other hand, an expert from the CEB argued that "Since the total number of applicants is large, it is difficult to conduct and manage entrance exams through interviews and written forms."The entrance exam that had been suggested by the department for use as a selection criterion was not yet implemented in the selection process. This, in turn, had affected the quality of the training program. It has to be noted that the difficulty in identifying the language proficiency of the candidates and the absence of information on the status of the required skills the candidates may have when they join the training makes it difficult to identify gaps to be filled during in-service courses.

### ii) Professional Development and Promotional Possibilities

It is clear that the provision and implementation of preschool teacher training is directly or indirectly linked with the policy and strategy of the nation's education system. The policies influence practices through articulating regulations, accountability and allocation of resources. They also set the structural frameworks and quality control mechanisms (Vargas-Baron, 2005). Thus, policy documents have a vital area to cover in the determination of provision of quality preprimary teacher training programs. The role of the government, as indicated in the policy document, is limited to developing curriculum, providing training and setting policy documents and strategies of implementation.

Teacher education has a long history of teacher training and education. Proper schooling cannot be conceived without the presence of qualified teachers. However, unlike other levels of education, the idea of formal preschool teacher training is a relatively recent phenomenon. To this end, lack of qualified trainers in teacher training colleges has led to a similar lack of preschool trained teachers. Most preschool teachers are either untrained or they may have very limited training.

Encouraging interview data has been obtained in this study on the extent of the government's involvement in the professionalization and career development of preprimary school teacher training programs. Interview participants reported that the attempts being made to develop and improve the teacher training programs were promising. Interview

participant from TTC had this to say in this connection. "The provision of the training program is improving." The participants said that attempts had been made to include the program in education policy, and the framework had been prepared. Trainings had also been arranged for all teachers- those who were teaching at the government and teachers in private preschools. However, according to the interview, the concern shown had much to be desired yet.

Another respondent commented, "The contribution of government especially in teacher training programs is limited and invisible."Data from the participant constituted, among others, lack of opportunity for further education in the area and lack of trainees' opportunity for compensation in the context of cost sharing service, and unattractive preschool teachers' salary as characteristic features of the program. And these examples are demonstrative of the inadequate attention the government paid to the program.

Data obtained from CEB experts contradicted the views reported by participants from TTC. They said the program was sufficiently successful in the education sub-sector. The excerpt quoted next has the evidence mentioned by the CEB. "The policies and strategies are designed to be used as framework of the subsector; and teacher training is initiated to provide quality education for the trainees."

In connection with financing preprimary teacher education, the respondents from CEB had the following to say.

The government is not going to employ the trainees after their completion of the training program. Because of this, the cost sharing system is not the concern of this level. But for the overall program the college is responsible for budgeting, programming and scheduling its financial demands … following the formal structure. Preprimary teacher training program is integrated with all other programs in the college. There is no need to expect a special treatment for the program.

Undeniably, shortage of school facilities and lack of sufficiently teachers trained for the level are affecting the teacher training program. In this connection, the experts tend to be correct in arguing that one of the major objectives of the institution (CEB) is to support and facilitate the training program. In this regard, they said, CEB intended to develop a collaborative effort to provide effective training program in the near future. In addition, they said, CEB was planning to evaluate the effectiveness and the implementation of the training program. One of the participants remarked: "Though formal future plan is not yet officially introduced, we are planning to establish strong relations with the college so as to strengthen the program and evaluate its implementation."

Needless to mention, it is essential to enhance the capacity of PPTTI both financially and materially. Despite this understanding, it is sad to note that the career development strategies and professional development programs are not specified for preschool teachers. There is a low salary structure. No incentive system is available in the sector. This threatens the interest of the teaching staff in pre-school sectors as a career path. New teachers often consider

teaching to be a stepping stone for future other career opportunities.

### iii) Curriculum Development and Teaching Methodology

Curriculum development is a critical aspect of educational program (Belete, and Hoot, 2005). Preprimary education curriculum is designed to meet the broad national educational objectives. It is used as a guideline for the scope and coverage of each content, time allotted for each course and activities to be included in the course. In this regard, the documents prepared centrally for training colleges and institutions were reviewed. Participants were also interviewed. According to the respondents, the designed curriculum was being used as a guideline for the courses, the objectives, allocation of time and for the sequence and scope of courses. The curriculum has been designed to elaborate all the guiding points of the training program. The curriculum fits the level since it gives emphasis to practical works. Also, it had the necessary descriptions of courses. But the problem is that the training center is not adequately equipped to implement this workable design. The curriculum designed needs a more facilitated environment and practically skilled trainers who are committed to active teaching methods.

Interview data from TTC respondent reveals that there is some mismatch between the training curriculum and the actual preschool center practice. The citation quoted next illustrates this.

There is a mismatch between what the trainees are learning and what they are expected to teach as has been observed during the practicum program …. Most private PPS are using English as the medium of instruction which is not included in the curriculum of teacher training.

This means that trainees receive training in Amharic, whereas English is the medium of instruction in the private preprimary schools. In fact, it is not only the instructional language that creates confusion, but also the learning contents and theories in preprimary schools and those reflected at the training college tend not to match well enough.

Education for very young children is expected to be practical and game-oriented (MoE, 2010). This has made using active learning method in preschool programs desirable. The syllabus designed to train the teachers of very young children also recommends the use of active learning method in preschool program. In particular, the respondent from the college said, "…it especially should be learner-oriented for the teachers of very young children." For this to happen, however, preschool teachers themselves need to get the desired training at the teachers' training centers. In the opinion of the respondent from TTC, however, interest and background of the trainees, large class size, inadequate teaching facilities, lack of teachers' readiness and willingness, among others, hindered proper implementation of the training syllabus. Proper implementation of the training syllabus requires better planning and preparation, adequate resources and facilities. These do not seem to be available in Kotebe College of Teachers' Education. As a result, the respondent from the college remarked, teacher-centered training is the most

frequently practiced training mode in the college.

In addition, during practicum sessions, trainees were exposed to practice actual teaching in preprimary schools for one month. The teaching practice is followed by discussions between the trainers and the trainees. The discussions usually focused on the challenges trainees faced, the nature of work and its environment, the interaction with students and staff and the school management. It was possible to understand from the replies obtained from the respondent that challenges such as financial problems, shortage of supervisors, lack of comments that could lead to improvement in the trainees' performances, etc. characterized the practicum. The difference in the medium of instruction used in the preschool teachers' training college and in the preprimary schools selected for practice was another point mentioned among the challenges faced the practicum. One example mentioned in the interview reflects the inadequate performances of many trainees in the classroom. Because of this, private preprimary schools in general did not want the trainees to practice teaching in their schools.

It is true that school facilities play a vital role in the provision of education and training program. Among many others, facilities have impact on access, quality, and efficiency of the training program. Needless to say, quality output cannot be expected without supplying quality input. In this study, in the attempt made to get some insight into the status of the input available in preschool teacher training program, interviews were conducted. Some documents were analyzed. Observations were also made.

Interview data from respondents (from CEB and TTC)reveals shortages of necessary teaching materials such as textbooks, classrooms, classroom facilities, photocopier and ICT in the preschool teacher training program considered in the study. The visit made to the practical conference also revealed that the training center had only one conference room for practical activities. Even that single room was crowded with materials not related to the purpose the conference was needed to serve.

### v) Links and Connections with other institutions

This section of the report deals with the relations and connections of the preschool teacher training institution with other organizations; namely, education administration offices, private institutions and non-government institutions. Interviews were conducted with the participants from CEB and TTC. The respondents reported the existence of a loose connection between the CEB and the training college. According to the expert from the City Education Bureau(CEB), the connection between the institutions is sadly limited and invisible. Their connection does not extend beyond meeting and discussions of proposals when there is some change in the program implementation. In addition, only unintended and urgent relations can be observed between the college, the sub cities and Kebele officials. Such occasional relations take place mainly when there are seminars or consultative meetings. All in all, the college's relation with different support-

ing organizations such as health, social, women, children and labor affairs is very thin. Similarly, the college's network with private PPS is limited only to practicum programs. Apparently, this has hindered the training college from getting feedback on, for instance, the trends of preprimary education in preschools and the performances required from the trainees. In short, it may be necessary to point out that there is a missing element in the training college that could facilitate and coordinate the college's relations with stakeholders.

Another important point raised in the interviews held with the participants was lack of in-service training opportunities for the trainers. In this connection, one of the interviewees remarked, "There was no long or short term training program for the staff."The respondent suggested the need for updating and developing the human resource in the college through continuous on-job trainings and refreshing conferences

### 5.3.4. Discussion and Conclusions

Sufficient statistical data on relevance, efficiency and quality of the training program is lacking. Reviewing relevant document reveals that issuing policy directives, setting standards for curriculum, supporting teachers training, supervising and licensing of pre-primary education institutions is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MoE 2006).Despite this provision, observation shows that the amount of supervision and support the colleges needs to maintain the quality of the preschool teacher training program does not seem to be sufficient.

Another challenging issue in the provision of quality preprimary teacher training program is connected with the curriculum used. Evidence in this study shows that the curriculum in use in the preschool teacher training program and in preprimary school were not sufficiently linked in terms of content, instructional language and the supply of the required facilities.

It has become clear in the findings of the study that pre-primary school teachers' salary is not encouraging. Besides, contrary to the Government's promise (TGE, 1994), the career development and motivational activities were not considered in the promotional structure of pre-school sectors. Thus, there is an urgent need for the creation of clear incentive structures and strong policy support to enhance the college's overall activities, including the quality of the training offered to the trainee teachers. Together with other factors, inadequate salary and poor working conditions that characterize most preprimary schools in the city as well as outside the city, appear to have the power to make the teachers lose interest in the profession. Needless to mention, the status of the interest workers have in their work hugely affects the quality of their output.

The connection between preprimary teacher training institutions and other supportive government and non-government organizations has been proved to be very thin. This means there are structural gaps between PPTTI and CEB. This carries with it the need for revisiting the institutional structure and enhancing the networking system with all the stakeholders.

In short, preprimary teacher training program in the college considered in this study generally does not appear to have been given suffi-

cient attention that a training college needs to be able to provide training of a good quality.

### 5.3.5. Policy Implications

It appears reasonable to suggest the need for revising the current GPA-based criteria to select trainees for the program. In addition to the existing selection criteria, it may be important to consider the inclusion of candidate's experience, interest, interviews and written exams to the basic components of the selection criteria.

Teacher training colleges need to consider alternative options to enhance internal revenue generation schemes. For example, opening model pre-schools may be one way to generate income. It is also possible for the college to provide paid consultancy services in pre-primary education. Many other similar options of generating income can be considered if budget is agreed to be among the major challenges that lower the quality of the training offered to preschool teachers. Introducing cost sharing schemes in the sector may minimize the trainees' financial problems.

An integrated policy is required in teacher training programs in line with the policy and curriculum of early childcare and education. The policy may assure the holistic child development through the provision of child care and education-oriented training to preschool teachers. It may also sound sensible to involve private organizations in teacher training programs. In this regard, the government can take the responsibility of setting the minimum standards to be met. In essence, the government can design policies and strategies of monitoring and controlling the implementation of the training programs in private organizations.

The future of preschool education may also require putting in place structure for career development, salaries, incentives and promotions for preschool teachers and the trainers in the college. A strong organizational structure which has clear demarcations of responsibilities entrusted to capable personnel may be needed to facilitate an effective implementation of the training program.

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**Comments on research paper**

● "Unless we focus on training and keep the quality of education and allocate appropriate budget we cannot expect a good result. There are cases where experienced facilitators are cornered only because their grade did not meet entrance requirements. We do not have to expect quality unless we do better in higher colleges. Enormous tasks are ahead to be done on facilitators development. I hope the Ministry will take this point into consideration." (An expert from Plan Ethiopia)

● "In order to meet the current shortage of facilitators in preschool education, it may be possible to create a system in which a short term training can be given to primary school teachers and make them also teach in preschools." (An expert from one of the Woreda Education offices)

● "Contextualized preschool curriculum can be prepared if a system which allows all pertinent stakeholders, including those teachers at preschool centers, can be put in place." (A Board member)

● "I suggest the study findings be distributed to those engaged in preschool education program. The findings appear to be helpful in expanding the ongoing tasks in this area."

● "We witness shortage of teachers in all government elementary schools. They want to join private schools for a better pay." (An instructor from Kotobe University College)

● "We all remember that once there was a time when private teacher training institutes had the authority to train teachers of different levels. With the government's close monitoring and supervision, reconsidering the measure taken at the time and authorizing private organizations again to train preschool teachers may help fill the gap. "(An Instructor from Addis Ababa University)

● "Ten colleges are providing preschool teachers training in Amhara region. On the other hand, there is a shortage of preschool teachers in the region. Partly, the cause of the shortage might be that not many of those who complete the training go for teaching in preschool program." (An expert from Amhara Region Education Bureau)

## 5.4. Preschool Education' for Rural Children: Lessons from the ESD - North Shewa projects

By Dr. Ambissa Kenea


### Abstract

The major purpose of the study was to look into the ESD pre-school initiatives in North Shewa, as one aspect of ECCE, and draw lessons that will help the effort to be made to scale up the initiative with the best practice. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of data for the study were grade-level-rosters and class registers at schools and preschool centers; preschool completers and preschool teachers; Grade 1 teachers and parents; and school leadership and project officers. Three ESD model pre-schools, five school-based pre-schools and three community-based centers that were selected on the basis of their accessibility via road transport were the sites from which the primary data sources were taken. From the ESD-model centers, children who were transferred to school in the 2012/13 Academic Year (AY) were mainly targeted for the tracer study. From the school-based ones, children who were transferred to Grade 1 in the 2013/14 AY were selected for the follow-up study. Accordingly, 78 children from the center-based program and 62 from the school-based program were selected and used in the followed-up study. A matched-control design was used to make comparisons of the children's scholastic performance based on pre-school attendance and non-attendance. Key findings of the study included the following. Children who attended preschool generally performed better during the first three primary grades than those who did not. However, the result was statistically significant only for grade one. Similarly, children who attended preschool were found to be better in terms of their social/behavioral achievements. In the comparison made between children from school-based background and those who were from ESD model preschools, the former were found to be superior in their social/behavioral outcomes. Besides, preschool completers were less likely to dropout compared to those who never attended preschool. Two variables happened to be positively associated with the children's scholastic achievements at Grade 1. One, the type of preschool attended [in favor of ESD pre-school centers], and; two, guardian's commitment to the children's schooling. At Grade 2 level, only one variable happened to be positively associated with scholastic achievements of the children, i.e. type of pre-school attended. Those who were from ESD preschool centers were found to be superior. The implications of these and many other findings of the study have been identified to guide further action both by ESD and all other concerned stakeholders.


### 5.4.1. Introduction

The early years in children's lives are critically important in their later success in education, career or income. As Isaacs (2008) writes, nurturing children from the earliest stages of their development increases their chances of achieving a lifelong success. According to Yoshikawa, et al. (2013), the early years in children's context are the time when the children build basic skills such as cognitive skills, social skills, persistence, attention, self-regulation

and executive functional skills (e.g. self-control). These basic and functional skills play a decisive role in the children's later lives. Early stimulation through proper care and education is very important to develop such skills (Engle et al, 2007) in Neuman and Devercelli, (2012)

The period from birth to the age of eight, often referred to as early childhood, is the period in which quality care and education programs can do most to 'break the cycle of inequalities that has dominated the lives of millions of children and families' (Sylva et al., (2004) and Munoz (2012)). Lack of proper care and education is a roadblock to such promises. Then, following Isaacs (2008), it can be noted that quality child care and education is an essential factor to lead children to success in life. It prepares children for learning and learning, in turn, enables them to overcome inequality, and inequity of opportunities. The most important aspects of quality in preschool education are stimulating and supportive interactions between teachers and the children and effective use of the curriculum (Yoshikawa, et al, 2013). Providing quality ECCE is thus an obvious means of preparing children for school. It is a response to the unique developmental needs of children; and above all, it is a right for the children.

Contrary to expectations, ECCE has not been prioritized both by governments and donors (Munoz, 2012). Such negligence may arise partly from adult-centric and human capital view- a view that can also be explained by the influence of international financial institutions. (In fact, upholders of this view are not sure about the relative economic return on investment in ECCE.) As a result, the private sectors dominate the ECCE sub-sector. This disfavors disadvantaged children whose parents/guardians cannot afford to pay, as well as other children found in small towns/rural areas. This appears to violate the convention on free basic education and the right to quality preschool education upheld in policy rhetoric.

### The Status of ECCE in the Local Context

Until very recently, the coverage of preschool education in Ethiopia was less than 5% of the appropriate age group (MoE, 2011). A more recent report of the MoE (2013/14) also does not show a better picture, i.e., the shar e of kindergarten in the Gross Enrollment is about 6%. In addition, the existing preschool programs are concentrated in urban centers and owned by private organizations. This, as indicated above, places those who cannot afford to pay and those who live in rural areas at a disadvantage.

Apparently, Ethiopia entrusted the responsibility of preschool education to parents/guardians and their respective communities until very recently. The support provided was limited to preparing curriculum guidelines, occasionally training preschool teachers and supervising. This was among the reasons for the educational inequity that existed in the country for long. Only the few who could afford sent their children to preschool.

Following the fourth Education Sector Development Strategy (ESDP IV), Ethiopia has recognized ECCE as a tool to boost the quality of education. This led to drafting a national ECCE policy framework for the first time. The framework has four pillars for its implementation: parental education, health and early childhood stimulation,

preschool and kindergartens, and mechanisms for non-formal school readiness (MoE 2010). This is an inter-sectoral policy headed by the Ministry of Education. The policy states that the Ministry of Health is responsible for care and stimulation of children 0-3/4 years of age, whereas the responsibility for children of 4-6/7 years of age goes to the Ministry of education. A national curriculum guideline was prepared to help in the implementation of the policy framework. Following the guideline, a school-based alternative program called an 'O-class' approach was initiated. The approach allows children to stay in school for one year prior to their admission to Grade one. The 'O-class' is managed by Para-professional teachers hired by community/schools, and in a few cases, where first-cycle primary school teachers are not scarce, one or two teachers are assigned to handle the class. 'Child-to-Child' program is, in some areas, reported to serve as an alternative to the 'O-class' program. As a result of such initiatives, the government reports that preschool coverage could reach 43.3% (MoE, 2013/14). Yet, quality appears to remain an issue of further work.

A more recent development is that Colleges of Teacher Education have started training preschool teachers. Yet, general observation shows that preschool education in the government system is often challenged by shortages such as poor quality of learning rooms, lack of play materials, unqualified teachers, poor leadership support and absence of the care component, among others. This may explain why support from civil societies, faith-based organizations and local communities is needed. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is one of such initiatives. Education for Sustainable Development is a Resident Charity Organization that is functioning in two Regional States in the country, namely, the Amhara Regional State and the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples.

### a) Statement of the problem

The purpose of development-based non-government organization is to complement the efforts of the government by trying out innovative practices on small scale within the policy framework, gain knowledge and skill and disseminate best practices that help in scaling up the endeavors to be made. Having the situation of ECCE described above as its backdrop for initiating the ECCE projects [with the support of its donor organization], ESD, supported with donor organizations, runs ECCE projects that mainly focus on preschool[1] education in two regional states. One is the Amhara Regional State. In the Amara Reginal State, 5 Woredas[2] from North-Shewa Zone, are included in the ECCE project. The projects in this Regional State started in 2009. SNNP Region is the other region of ESD's focus for ECCE projects. Accordingly, ESD started to run ECCE projects in 2 Woredas of Sidama Zone, SNNP Region in 2013.

In North Shewa, ESD first started piloting ECCE projects in three preschool forms. These are the ESD-model preschool center, the school-based approach and the community-based approach. The ESD-model preschool is a fairly self-sufficient center and geographically located close to primary schools. It has a separate

[1] Refers to education program/opportunity immediately before school (mostly for those aged 4-6).

[2] Woreda is almost similar to the District

compound. The school-based preschool class, on the other is mostly one classroom reserved from primary school. Children aged 4-6 years are placed in the room to learn separately from the other children of the school. The school-based preschool class is structurally connected to and managed by primary schools. The community-based preschool center is a center located in the community neighborhood, away from school. The center is established to bring schools to communities. It is needed to solve home-school distance using low cost building built by local communities. Studying which of these preschool education approaches is the most effective and appropriate is one crucial and timely research agenda in the context of the project area.

Clearly, the project mainly focuses on rural area children who do not have the opportunity for preschool education. Studying the impacts of the project, in terms of scholastic achievements, social/behavioral outcomes and attachment to school, on the children who attended the ESD preschool is another issue worth investigation.

Hence, this study was designed to look into the experiences of the project with a general purpose of documenting lessons on the possibility of preschool education for rural children in Ethiopia.

### b) Objectives of the study

The study had the following three major objectives:

1) To document lessons to be learned from the ESD approaches to preschool education for rural children.

2) To identify the possible impacts of pre-school education on children's later scholastic achievement, social/behavioral outcomes and school retention.

3) To document the impact of ECCE project on the local community in terms of addressing children's early education.

### c) Basic research questions

Based on the above objectives, the study was designed to find answers to the following research questions:

1) Is there any a statistically significant difference, in terms of scholastic achievements, social/ behavioral outcomes and school retention, between children who attended the ESD preschool and those who did not attend?

2) Is there a statistically significant difference in the children's achievements due to gender, birth order, and presence of literate member in the family, age at entry to preschool, relation with guardians, guardian's income, and guardian's commitment to the child's education?

3) Do the differences in achievement, if any, vary across grade levels?

4) Which preschool approach is most relevant within the context of the project locality? 5) What are the likely effects of the preschool project at the local community level in terms of addressing educational equity?

### d) Scope of the study

The study was conducted on two cohorts of children who attended the ESD preschool program. From among the children who attend the ESD preschool program, only those who were transferred to Grade one in 2012/13 and those who were transferred in 2013/14 Academic

Years were considered in the study. The cohorts were normally expected to be in Grades 4 and 3 respectively in (2015/16) academic year. The impacts of the project were seen in terms of academic achievement and social/behavioral outcomes. The sites for the study were primary schools and preschool centers/sections taken from North Shewa Projects (Amhara Regional State).

### e) Limitations

There were several problems that constrained the data collection process. In particular, lack of well-organized data at some of the schools and preschool centers for the tracer/follow-up study was a critical challenge. Hence, the team had to trace the children based on attendance registers and classroom search. Some of the teachers who had taught the children were transferred from the districts. Hence, the team had to depend on the support of the teachers who were available. Some parents could not come for school meeting due to their busy harvest season. Hence, we had to do home visits, and that itself, was not found to be easy. Irrespective of such limitations, the team managed to collect valid data for the study.

## 5.4.2. Methods of the study

The study followed the mixed methods design wherein both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. Particularly, the concurrent triangulation strategy, in which the collection of the qualitative and quantitative data happens in one phase of the research study was followed. This study allows integration of the results of the two methods during the interpretation phase (Creswell, 2003). Accordingly, the major qualitative and quantitative data used for the study were generated during the fieldwork that took place in October 2015. Interpretation was made based on the integrated qualitative and quantitative data, and this helped in sorting out the convergence and/or divergence of the findings as a way to strengthen or refute the knowledge claims of the study.

### a) Data sources

The principal primary sources of data for the study were grade-level-rosters and class registers at schools and preschool centers/sections; preschool complete children; preschool teachers; 'Grade 1' teachers; parents; school leadership and project officers. Besides, literature on approaches and impacts of early childhood care and education was extensively reviewed.

### b) Sampling

The step taken first to reach the sources of data was to sample the preschool centers/schools. This decision was based on the accessibility of the sources of data by vehicle. Accordingly, Cheki, Chacha, and Wushawishign from among the ESD-model preschool centers; Deneba, SiyaDebir, Dibut, Andinet and Genet from among the school-based preschool providers and MutiKeransa, Alemgena and Chalelekit from among the community-based providers were taken, Hence, about 18% of the 62 ECCE providers (centers and schools) in the project were considered in the study. The community-based centers started functioning late, and because of this, no child was transferred to school during the sampling period. This made the inclusion of the centers in the study im-

possible. Hence, the tracer study focused on the two major providers - i.e., the ESD-model preschool centers and the school-based ones. From the ESD-model centers, children who were transferred to school in the 2012/13 AY were mainly targeted for the tracer study. From the school-based program, children who were transferred to Grade 1 in the 2013/14 AY were selected for the follow-up study. (In fact, at Dibut children who were transferred to Grade 1 in the 2012/13 AY were also considered.) Accordingly, 78 children from the center-based program and 62 from the school-based program were identified and considered in the follow-up aspect of the study.

From among the children identified for tracer study, five children who were available on the day the particular school visit was made were randomly selected and interviewed from each school. Parents of the interviewed children were also interviewed. One preschool teacher was interviewed from each center. Similarly, Grade 1 teachers whose names were identified from the rosters/class registers were interviewed, if they were available at the school the day the interview was conducted. Therefore, 45 children who attended preschool, 40 parents, 11 preschool teachers, 23 Grade 1 teachers and 11 school principals were interviewed. The interviews with each participant were much focused and took from 10 to 30 minutes. Apart from these stakeholders, project officers and Woreda education officers were also interviewed.

To serve as a 'matched control group,' students who did not attend any preschool education were taken from the same grade-level-rosters. The sampling of these children was at random - every child whose name was listed on the school roster next to the name of the child considered for the follow-up purpose was taken as long as the child did not attend any organized preschool program. Hence, in the analysis the scholastic achievements of these children were compared against the achievements of the children who attended the ESD-preschool program.

### C) Data Collection Process

Prior to setting the data collection tool, a week-long visit was made to the project sites to collect qualitative data to explore specific points to consider for inclusion in the actual study. The data obtained through this exercise was put together and examined in terms of the data collection format intended for use. The format was open - studying documents, i.e., grade-level-rosters and class registers, as well as the interviews. Besides, indicative interview guides were prepared to facilitate discussion during the interviews. Center observation guide was also prepared to guide the assessment of the community-based ECCE centers.

The data collection tools were reviewed by experts in the field of early childhood care and education prior to finally using them. Project officers provided their comments on the tools. After finalizing the tools, a team of researchers, including two project officers and the principal researcher, collected the data.

### d) Methods of data analysis

The quantitative data was entered into appropriate data sheet of the SPSS out of which descriptive statistics had been computed. Analysis of variance using independent sample t-test and

One-way ANOVA, as appropriate, was also run to infer whether there was any statistically significant differences among groups along the identified variables. The field notes taken during the interviews and center observations were studied and themes that match the issues contained in the basic research questions were identified. The themes were described and used to make possible explanation of the phenomena. This in turn helped to create understanding of the observed variations from the quantitative data.

### e) Ethical considerations

Attempts were made to keep the basic ethical principles of research with/on human subjects, namely, informed consent, confidentiality and objectivity; among others. The purpose of the data collection was explained to each participant prior to requesting them for their consent to act as data sources. The reporting of result was done carefully to make sure that no human source of data was identifiable from the opinions expressed. Objectivity in interpretation and reporting as well as using non-biased language was the other means used to appeal to the need for ethical conduct of the study.

## 5.4.3. Results and discussion

This section reports the results of the data analysis and interpretation vis-à-vis the knowledge claims of the study. It is organized under five sub-sections, namely:

- the ESD-preschool approach,
- impacts of preschool attendance,
- influence of variables on preschool completers scholastic achievements,
- relevance and effectiveness of the ESD's three preschool approaches,
- school-level as well as community-level impacts of the project.

### a) The Project: the preschool component

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) initiated early childhood care and education in rural areas of North Shewa Zone (Amhara Regional State) and in Sdama Zone (SNNPR) in 2009 and 2013 [respectively] with the financial support from FSI (major), ICDI, UBS (earlier) and PCF (only 2012/13). The first round of preschool education, which followed the ESD-Model preschools, was those started at Cheki, Chacha, Wushawushign and Debele. During the next phase of the project the school-based model started in 2011 schools, which later added the community-based preschool centers. The purpose of opening community-based preschool centers was to bring preschool service close to the community. The preschool centers/sections mainly admitted children of age 5 and 6, as reported by their guardians. Yet, there were times when younger, e.g. 4 years old children joined the preschool centers.

According to ESD field monitoring reports, the projects used community sensitization and the support of Kebele[3] structures to initiate community members to bring their children to the preschool centers. At first, this was an important challenge, as the community wanted the children for various activities such as looking after animals around home, taking care of siblings, keeping houses, etc. Gradually, however, the increase in the community's awareness led

[3] Administrative structure below the District [or the Woreda]

to tremendous improvement in the preschool enrolment.

The facilitators or preschool educators were recruited from the locality, after receiving a brief induction but before starting teaching. At the moment, there are opportunities for the teachers to attend in-service training programs. Under normal circumstances, two teachers, main teacher and an assistant, are assigned to one center. The project covers the remuneration of the teachers; and this, is generally less than the salary for the regular teachers.

The preschool centers/sections follow the curriculum guide prepared by Amhara Regional State. The daily activities of the curriculum contained:

a) mother tongue (reading and writing);

b) English (i.e., alphabet and word formation) c) Numbers, environmental science, health/ sanitation, social skills, etc.

d) aesthetics (art and music), and

e)child plays (in-door as well as outdoor).

In the rural areas the preschool day is only in the morning (from 8 am to about 12:30 pm) and the school year is similar to the regular school calendar of the Woreda. The children attend preschool program for 2 years and get transferred to Grade 1.

The ESD-model centers are fairly well-furnished. Apart from the self-sufficient physical facilities, a fairly good amount of in-door and outdoor play materials and locally produced as well as purchased learning materials are available at each center. The school-based preschool sections have basic learning and play materials supplied by the project. These include purchased materials and materials that are locally made/adapted]. The centers largely use the physical facilities of the schools.

### b) Preschool attendance and children's school performances

Studies indicate that preschool attendance improves scholastic achievements, social/behavioral outcomes, school retention, career success and improvement in income (Barnett, 1995; Sylva, 2004; Isaacs, 2008; Barnett and Ackerman, 2006). The extent of the outcomes may vary depending on the role played by each of such variables as the quality of the input and the process of the program, parent/guardian-related factors, community-related factors, etc. However, it can generally be expected that preschool experience can at least contribute to improved learning outcomes during the early primary school years. The present study takes this minimalist expectation in trying to examine the association of the preschool experiences of the children with their scholastic achievement, social/behavioral outcomes and school retention (reduced dropout).

**Table 1: Scholastic achievements of children with preschool and children without preschool**

| Average score | Preschool attendance | N | Mean | SD | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 1 | Yes | 139 | 63.32 | 13.26 | *2.708 |
| | No | 109 | 58.55 | 14.29 | |
| Grade 2 | Yes | 102 | 66.94 | 8.40 | 944. |
| | No | 78 | 65.54 | 11.54 | |
| Grade 3 | Yes | 81 | 70.12 | 8.91 | 261. |
| | No | 63 | 69.71 | 9.78 | |

*P<0.01

As expected, the mean scores of children who attended preschool program prior to Grade 1is greater than that of those who did not attend preschool. However, the difference between the two groups is statistically significant only for Grade 1 [t=2.71, P<0.05]. Does this difference hold true for literacy and numeracy?

Clearly, stimulation on early acquisition of numeracy and literacy is among the principal purposes of preschool education. According to the curriculum guide, Amharic and Mathematics are the subjects that are directly concerned with literacy and numeracy. Hence, if preschool education has brought any difference in scholastic achievements of the children, it has to first and foremost make differences in their Amharic and Mathematics scores. Table 2 below presents the result obtained in this regard.

**Table 2: Achievements in Amharic and Mathematics**

| Subject | Preschool attendance | N | Mean | SD | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amharic Grade 1 | Yes | 140 | 66.43 | 13.89 | *3.71 |
| | No | 109 | 59.16 | 16.62 | |
| Amharic Grade 2 | Yes | 102 | 69.90 | 12.80 | 0.92 |
| | No | 78 | 68.00 | 14.89 | |
| Amharic Grade 3 | Yes | 81 | 72.35 | 12.35 | 1.30 |
| | No | 63 | 69.56 | 12.95 | |
| Math Grade 1 | Yes | 140 | 65.08 | 14.38 | *2.95 |
| | No | 109 | 59.26 | 16.75 | |
| Math Grade 2 | Yes | 102 | 67.07 | 11.19 | 74. |
| | No | 78 | 65.67 | 14.31 | |
| Math Grade 3 | Yes | 82 | 67.93 | 10.58 | -0.32 |
| | No | 67 | 68.55 | 13.3 | |

P<0.01

The result shown in Table 2 is consistent with the finding reported in Table 1 earlier. In other words, Grade 1 Amharic and Mathematics scores of students who attended preschool education is superior to the scores of those who did not get the opportunity. However, the mean difference is statistically significant only for Grade 1 of both subjects [t=3.71, P<0.05 for Amharic and t=2.95, P<0.05 for Mathematics]. The difference in the scores of the children who attended preschool and that of the students who did not, decline over time (see study by Isaacs, 2008 and Yoshikawa, et al (2013), but this may not occur right after the first Grade. Hence, there can be additional explanation for the children in the project area. One important explanation could be absence of continued reinforcement on what the children bring to Grade 1. This can be learned from the following excerpts extracted from two teachers who had taught the children earlier in Grade 1.

The preschool completers are very important because of two reasons: they master Amharic after staying at the center for two years. Hence communicating with such children is not difficult. The other and more important thing is they help us in helping other children learn to identify letters and numbers. If you have preschool completers you do not have a problem in achieving the objective of enabling every child to identify the letters and numbers before the semester ends. (A Teacher from Cheki primary school).

Similarly, another teacher from Andinet primary school has this to say.

When you teach in Grade 1 the major challenges are to have children to follow directions and help them identify letters and numbers. If you have a few children who are from preschool, life will be easy for you. They act on your behalf to help the children who struggle with identifying letters and numbers. That is why every teacher in Grade 1 wishes to have some children who have attended preschool. As a result, the children from preschool are distributed as fairly as possible across the sections and are not put together in just one section.

The data obtained from these teachers confirms, on the one hand, that children from preschools join Grade 1 better prepared for school. On the other hand, it implies that there is a tendency in Grade 1 to focus on helping those children who do not have prerequisite preparation for Grade 1. It is sad to note that there was no mechanism in the system to help the preschool completers advance from the pace already achieved in preschool. For instance, while they make use of the children as a help in supporting other unprepared children, teachers could also apply differentiated instruction that helps every child to advance at their own pace and level of achievement. In this connection, as shown in the quotes below, the children's opinions deserve attention.

Grade 1 is simply a repetition of what we learned in preschool. (A child from Cheki Primary School)

We learnt counting letters and numbers both at preschool and in Grade 1 (A child from Genet Primary school)

There are some children who come to school without attending Kindergarten. In Grade 1 we have to repeat with them everything we fin-

ished in the Kindergarten (A child from Andinet Primary School).

Writers of Grade 1 Amharic and Mathematics textbooks appear to have written the books with the assumption that children in grade 1 had no opportunity to attend preschool. The assumption does not sound incorrect given the reality of the majority of rural-children in the country. Yet, teachers need to be made aware that opportunities for preschool have since recently come into existence in selected rural areas. This realization should have an implication for classroom implementation of the textbooks. A balanced approach of some kind that takes into account mixed abilities in the classroom might help. Apparently, the arrangements schools make in the classroom, such as the ones described by the teachers quoted earlier, puts the preschool completers at a disadvantage. Disadvantages of this type may explain the decline in the difference between the achievements of preschool completers and that of the children who did not attend preschool.

The other area where preschool education is expected to have impact was the social/behavioral outcome. Teachers were asked to rate the social/behavioral situation of the ESD-preschool completers who got admitted to their class at Grade 1 based on the following criteria:

- Social relationship with peers & teachers
- Attention and following directions & school routines
- Motivation for school/classroom activities
- Self-regulation (identifying & controlling one's emotions)
- Self-reliance in learning [while positively relating to others]

A three-point Likert-type scale was used and the result has been organized as follows.

**Table 3: Teachers' rating of social/behavioral development of the preschool completers against that of the children who did not attend preschool**

| i | Minimum score | Maximum score | Mean | SD | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 81 | 9 | 15 | 12.1975 | 1.59 | 12.42 |

P<0.05

Tested using the single sample t-test [with 10 point as median point], the observed mean was statistically significant (t = 12.42, P<0.01). This means that children who attended preschool program had better social/behavioral development than those who did not attend preschool.

A comparison of the children's social/behavioral achievements was made to see which type of preschool program arrangements best prepared children socially/behaviorally for school. Table 4 below summarizes the data collected in this connection.

**Table 4: Social/behavioral achievement of the preschool completers.**

| Type of preschool | N | Mean | SD | Test value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School-based | 17 | 12.88 | 1.73 | *T = 2.03 |
| ESD-Model | 64 | 12.01 | 1.52 | |

P<0.05

As shown in Table 4, the observed mean difference was statistically significant [t=2.03, P<0.05]. Hence, children who attended school-based preschool program seemed better than those who attended the model program. This happened to be so perhaps because of the possibility for close interaction between the children in the preschool center and those in the regular school program. Does attending preschool have any relation with dropping out of school? Dropout in the present study refers to a situation in which a student discontinues his/her studies before the end of a school year. It excludes children who complete their studies in the given academic year but fail to show up the following academic year. Factors such as mobility of parents/guardians make tracing such children difficult. Table 7 below presents this data.

**Table 5: Dropout rate: whole batch vs. preschool completers**

| :Dropout rate of | | Minimum | Maximum | Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *the whole batch | Grade 1 | 2 | 10 | 4 |
| | Grade 2 | 3 | 7 | 3.5 |
| | Grade 3 | 1 | 6 | 2.5 |
| preschool completers | Grade 1 | 0 | 2 | 1.5 |
| | Grade 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| | Grade 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

*Refers to the batch from which the preschool completers were taken from all the schools.

As can be understood from the data presented in Table 7, the average dropout rate of the preschool completers is less than that of the whole batch across all the three Grades. This is consistent with what is normally expected, as early stimulation increases motivation for school work (see the work of Apps, Mendolia and Walker, 2012).

### c) Preschool completers' achievements vis-à-vis identified 'attribute variables'

As repeatedly noted in this paper, attending preschool is associated with future positive outcomes for children during their stay in school as learners and when they join the world of work as adults. However, several studies indicate that the kind and amount of future outcome depends on several factors. Here are a few such studies. According to Isaacs (2008); Apps, Mendolia and Walker (2012); Cascio and Schanzenbach (2013); while all children benefit from preschool programs, the benefit is higher for children from lower income families. To Isaacs (2008), family factors such as income, motivation level, level of education and maternal employment have some impact on how much children benefit from preschool programs. deCoulon; Meschi; and Vignolso (2008), on their part, consider intergenerational transfer of skills when they talk about the role of parental education on children's cognitive skills/development. The assumption held in the study being reviewed is that children from unschooled parents are disadvantaged more when compared to those from the educated parents.

Hence, access to preschool services is not enough for children to become successful in their education, and in their later career life. Multiple variables, in one way or the other, impact up on the extent to which preschool education brings about differences in the later scholastic achievements of children. Therefore, the following variables have been identified to examine if they have any association with children's scholastic achievements. These are gender, birth order of the children, presence of literate member in the family, presence of elder brothers/sisters who attend school, age at entry to preschool, relation with guardian, guardian's income[4], academic support at home, and guardian's commitment to the child's education. Tables 5 and 6 present the summary of the findings.

[4] *Even though the project generally defines the community members as needy, I tried to make some differentiation by focusing on how the family sees itself: moderate economic standing [self-sufficient], low economic standing [can fulfill the most basic needs, including education of children], and low [struggle even to fulfill the basic needs].*

**Table 6: First Graders' performances across some 'attribute-variables'**

| Attributes | label | N | Mean | SD | Test value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 78 | 61.67 | 12.95 | t = 1.67 |
| | Female | 66 | 65.45 | 13.45 | |
| Birth order | First | 41 | 66.48 | 12.94 | F = 1.84 |
| | Middle | 75 | 62.39 | 14.11 | |
| | Last | 22 | 60.57 | 9.82 | |
| Type of preschool | School-based | 60 | 59.78 | 15.19 | *t = 2.81 |
| | ESD-Model | 78 | 66.03 | 10.89 | |
| Literate member in the family | Yes | 97 | 63.20 | 13.92 | t = 1.54 |
| | No | 41 | 63.58 | 11.71 | |
| Brothers/sisters already in school | Yes | 57 | 59.72 | 13.11 | *t = 2.73 |
| | No | 81 | 65.84 | 12.85 | |
| Age of entry to pre-school | 4th year | 10 | 58.95 | 7.28 | F = 0.72 |
| | 5th year | 114 | 63.44 | 13.27 | |
| | 6th year | 14 | 65.43 | 16.28 | |
| Current guardian | Biological parent | 103 | 63.38 | 13.11 | F = 0.85 |
| | Relatives | 27 | 61.53 | 14.19 | |
| | Employers or others | 8 | 68.50 | 12.10 | |
| Guardian's income | Moderate | 32 | 66.69 | 13.71 | F = 1.62 |
| | Low | 95 | 62.61 | 12.56 | |
| | Very low | 11 | 59.60 | 16.95 | |
| Academic support at home | Yes | 36 | 62.88 | 12.56 | F = 0.08 |
| | ... Yes, but | 69 | 63.77 | 14.77 | |
| | No | 33 | 62.84 | 10.77 | |
| Parental /guardian commitment | High | 30 | 67.25 | 8.06 | *F = 2.93 |
| | Moderate | 31 | 69.47 | 10.23 | |
| | Low | 18 | 63.16 | 7.11 | |

P<0.05

Three variables happen to be associated with the children's scholastic achievements at Grade 1; namely, type of preschool attended, presence of sister/brother in school, and guardian's commitment to the children's schooling. The mean difference of the children's who attended the ESD-model preschools and those who attended the school-based program was found to be statistically significant [t = 2.81, P<0.05]. Hence, children who attended the ESD-model preschool program scored better than those who attended the school-based program at Grade 1 level. This agrees with expectations, as the overall situation of model schools is better than that of school-based program.

It is expected that children whose elder brother/sister is already in school will be more motivated to work at school and to make a better use of the opportunities created by the school. The present finding does not seem to support this since the mean scores of children who reported to have brothers/ sisters already in school was lower than the scores of the children who reported not having elder brother/sister in school. The difference between the two groups was found to be statistically significant [t= 2.73, p<0.05].

One possible explanation for this could be that the project was introduced to motivate parents who did not have the experience to send their children to school. The intervention might also have motivated parents to do better (supporting children at home with their school work, for example) than just sending them to school. Another possible explanation could be that when there is no culture of supporting children at home with school work, the sole presence of educated family member may not be sufficient enough to make a change.

Guardian's commitment was also found to have a statistically significant association with children's performances at Grade 1 [F=2.93, P<0.05]. A Post Hoc comparison using Tukey HSD indicated that the difference lies between 'moderate commitment' and 'low commitment'. In other words, guardians with 'moderate' and 'high' commitment had almost the same motivating effect on children's scholastic outcomes.

Similarly, an attempt was made to see whether the variables had any statistically significant association with the children's scholastic achievement at Grade 2 level. As presented in Table 6, it was only one variable, i.e. type of preschool, that was found to have some association.

**Table 6: Performances of Grade 2 children across selected 'attribute-variables'**

| Attributes | label | N | Mean | SD | Test values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Type of preschool | School-based | 35 | 62.59 | 8.15 | *t = 4.04 |
| | ESD-Model | 67 | 69.21 | 7.64 | |

P<0.05

Here too, children who attended the ESD-model preschool seemed to have scored higher than those who attended the school-based preschools. The mean difference between the two groups was statistically significant [t=4.04, P<0.05].

The ESD-model preschool program appears to be successful in both Grades 1 and 2. This is consistent with a study by Sylva et al. (2004) which indicated that programs that integrated education and care as well as those that took place in better settings were better in terms of having a positive impact on children's later achievements. It should be noted that the ESD-model preschool programs integrated care with education. The programs are also better in terms of their physical conditions. These could perhaps explain why the ESD-model preschool programs stand higher than the school-based preschools.

As far as Grade 3 is concerned, none of the variables identified in this study seemed to have any statistically significant association with the children's scholastic achievements.

### d) A comparison of the three approaches

As presented earlier (see sub-section 3.3), the ESD-model preschool completers were superior in their Grade 1 school average achievements to those who completed preschool at school-based program. On the other hand, children who completed preschool in the school-based program were superior in social/behavioral outcomes to those who went to the ESD-model preschool centers. The superiority of the ESD-model preschool completers may be attributed to the resource situation whereas the superiority of the school-based program in the social/behavioral development seemed to be attributable to the location of the center within a school setting.

At this point, one may take interest in finding out about the community-based preschool centers.

According to the project workers, the community-based preschool programs were established to overcome the problem of home-center distance. Some villages are far from the schools/centers where the preschool programs are organized. This necessitated the project to work with local communities to establish community-based preschool centers. Community-based preschool centers demand active involvement of the local community, and this, apparently, ensures sustainability of the centers. However, the programs are located far away from the schools. They are also programs of low cost. They could not get some of the advantages the other two approaches enjoyed. It may

also be unfair to compare the community-based preschool programs with the other two programs in terms of scholastic as well as social/behavioral outcomes. One can say, they are relevant in their own ways.

### e) School - and Community-level impacts of the project

In many developing countries, as argued in Hong et al. (2015), regional gap of early childhood education, especially the gap between the urban and rural areas, was still enlarging. Ethiopia is not an exception to this. There is no doubt that equity is an important concern in the Ethiopian education. In particular, the gap between rural and urban as well as center and periphery needs to be carefully addressed. The government is taking cost-effective actions (such as the 'O-class'). This is thought to open up preschool opportunity for a large number of children. Yet, the gap, for example, in the quality of services, is feared to continue further still. The economic, political, cultural, etc. differences among the regions in the country tend to complicate the issue of equity in education. Hence, it is time to think about and experiment with the approach that works best in certain context and scale it up. The ESD approach provided an alternative avenue for this.

Clearly, rural parents need children for routine activities inside and around home. One popular belief about children goes like this in the society: Children are often productive right from the day they start walking up right. Hence, sending them to preschool may sound an expensive decision. The ESD activities are here to fight and overcome such a traditional thinking. For example, with the arduous efforts of the communities, the government, and ESD (with its donor partners), a large members of the communities were made to have the awareness needed to understand the benefits their children can get from early education. The need for community-based preschool centers arises from this background.

Preschool centers also came into existence at a time when the local government was about to start the 'O-class' approach. Hence, the centers were good references to start with. The Woreda Education Officers recognize that the preschool centers are also centers for experience sharing in the effort to build local capacity in the area.

At school level, preschool completers served as 'standard setters' for children who did not have preparation for formal school. In some cases, preschool completers helped their underprepared peers to identify letters and numbers as quickly as possible. In peripheral Woredas, where there are children who join school without any functional skills in using Amharic, the preschool children helped their peers to learn letters fairly quickly.

## 5.4.4. Conclusions and implications

It has been noted in the present study that the preschool completers were generally better in terms of their scholastic achievements than their peers who had no opportunity for preschool education, particularly at Grade 1 level. They are also better in terms of social/behavioral development as well as attachment

to school. Preschool completers from the ESD-model preschool centers were superior to those who were from the school-based in terms of their scholastic achievement. Children who completed their preschool from the school-based preschool were superior in terms of social/behavioral development. Parental/ guardian's commitment to the children's schooling was found to be a very significant correlate of the achievements of the children.

Ethiopia had preschool education. Providers of preschool education in the country included the church, the mosque, the elders and other family members, etc. in the past. A more modern approach to preschool education appeared following the introduction of modern education to the country in the first few decades of the twenty-first century. The present preschool education policy has four pillars; namely, parental education, preschool and kindergarten and mechanisms for non-formal school readiness such as the Child-to-Child program or the 'O-Class'. Reviewing the success of the approaches to preschool, with the intention to scaling up the most promising one, has come to be a pressing need.

Education for Sustainable Development has tried three of the possibilities, and these have demonstrated successes and pitfalls. Below are some implications regarding the scaling up of the results achieved by the ESD preschool projects. However, it needs to be pointed out that the possibilities for alternative interpretations; and then, alternative implications of the findings of this study, cannot be ruled out.

1) Resource in the form of in-door and outdoor play materials are very essential for success in terms of scholastically preparing children for school. It may not be possible, (or even desirable, given the shortage of one thing here and lack of another thing there), to have in all the schools/centers the kind of resources ESD has provided to model centers. However, it is possible to build local capacities to produce teaching materials from locally available resources. The ESD Pedagogical Resource Centers can be a good place to learnt how to do this from the local resources.

2) Community-based programs are relevant in many rural areas largely due to the distance and topography of areas in some regions. They are also relevant because they are owned by the local community. They can be taken as the 'modern' form of our traditional centers of preschool learners. However, they need to be considered as satellite centers connected to the adjacent schools rather than standalone centers. This will have multiple benefits, as experimented in ESD. The centers get professional support as well as resources. The educators at such centers associate themselves with teachers from adjacent schools and take their roles seriously. They prepare themselves with clear institutional purpose in mind.

3) No doubt, teacher qualification and mobility at all levels of schooling is a problem and will continue to be so in the education system in the years to come. Preschool education will not be an exception. The ESD approach to recruiting teachers from the locality may be a good approach to adapt. In recruiting teachers, Education for Sustainable Development

used a brief initial orientation and a continued in-service program. Scaling up the kind of frequent in-service training ESD used may not be feasible. Hence, it may be advisable to have a package of initial training, until adequate, and professionally trained teachers come to join the preschool centers.

4) Preschool completers have obviously better skills than the skill Grade 1 children are assumed to possess. Therefore, there is a need for Grade 1 teachers to learn how to apply differentiated instruction in which they can help different groups of children to advance at their own pace in the same room. This needs to continue even into the higher grades. Alternatively, it is possible to have preschool completers together in a different class. Teachers appear to benefit much if a curriculum adaptation manual or handbook can be prepared to help smoothen this transition from pre-school to Grade 1.

5) Ethiopia is working hard to push further child rights to education. Prior to that, there is a need to win hearty support from parents/guardians. ESD has experimented with that and has been able to win the support of the community. For any effort made to expand preschool education, there has to be community sensitization and mobilization. In addition, political support, and even commitment beyond just home visits, is very essential in this regard.

6) Parents/guardians/family members need to provide academic support. Sending children to preschool and leaving everything else to the teacher is no longer enough. This means that substantial efforts need to be made to create a literate environment at home for every child. The present study indicated that guardians' commitments made a difference (+VE) in the children's academic achievements. Hence, even if the principal guardians [e.g. fathers and mothers] may not be literate, it is possible to train any literate or semi-literate member (s) of the family, who the child gets on with, on how to provide academic support.

7) Creating connections with community health posts is a very essential precondition for early meaningful health care and education. It appears relevant to consider what administrative mechanisms can be put in place to facilitate close working relations. Alternatively, it is possible to provide pre-school teachers with holistic training that helps them provide reasonable care and support to the children, whenever and wherever health posts are not possible.

8) In many sub-urban areas [e.g., like Chacha] there are community members who can financially afford to intervene in the attempt to be made to address, at least partially, the acute need for preschools. For example, it may be fruitful to consider encouraging private investors to try expanding low-cost rural private preschools. If such a rudimentary form of 'cost-sharing' happens to be successful, promising chances are in sight to scale up the practice in many rural areas elsewhere in the future.

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### Comments and questions on the presentation

- "In 2007 Eth. C. we had 150 grade 1 children. Out of these, 49 passed through preschool and the other 101 directly joined formal school. When we see the dropout rate most of the dropouts were children who did not attend preschool education." (A Woreda Experts whose community benefited from ESD)

- "This year (2008 Eth. C.) a total of 235 children were registered in school. Out of these, 83 children did not attend preschool. Around 43 children who received a good support in preschool have now become class leaders. This has reduced the burden for grade one teachers. ESD has been supporting us since 2004. It has established 8 preschool centers, and some of them are upgraded to primary school." (One of the Woreda Experts whose community benefited from ESD)

- "ESD has been supporting in school centers, in giving on-job training, continuous assessment, practical research and science laboratory uses. Furthermore, ESD donated reference books to grades 1-8 children. In addition, ESD trained 8 facilitators who are employed in preschool this year. The salary of facilitators, however, remains still to be a matter of concern to all of us. . A facilitator stays the whole day with children because the children need attention all day. The small payment he/she receives cannot meet the current cost of living, and attention is needed to improve the situation." (A Woreda Experts whose community benefited from ESD)

## 6. Visit to project site

As part of the conference program, site visits were arranged for participants to have better practical insight into the ESD program. Accordingly, the following ESD project sites were visited.

### Debrebirhan Pedagogical Resource Center

The resource center was established by ESD to provide learning aids for preschool education centers and training to partner school teachers on the preparation of teaching materials. The Resource Center has personnel trained at the Walayita Montessori Center. Hence, the materials on display at the Pedagogical Resource Center were of two type: the materials the technicians received from Wolayita Montessori Methods Training Center and the ones prepared at the center. During their visit, briefings were given to the participants about the functions of the resource center. Participants asked questions. The questions were answered by the technicians. Wherever needed, further clarifications were given by the center coordinators. The participants suggested scaling up the efforts might be fruitful in addressing the acute shortage of learning materials in pre-school centers. Hence, it may be a promising alternative to establish such centers at least at each Woreda.

### Mesno Amba Primary and school-based preschool

Mesno Amba primary school is located some 7kms away from Debrebirhan on the way to Ankober. The school has two sections of the

preschool education namely level I and Level II. There are around 20 children attending in each section. The children who completed the level II in preschool directly join grade one of the linked primary school.

Birtukan, Emebet and friends partnership business Group ( a self-help group)

This self-help group was established in November 2004 Eth. C. The group has 16 members. There are 52 children ( 27 female and 25 male) supported by the group. Members of the self-help group are low income mothers selected from the surrounding rural areas. ESD has given various business skills as well as health related trainings to the group. It also gave them financial support to run their business. Some of the self-help group major tasks are helping the old and the weak, providing loan to members and planting trees, etc.

### Chacha model preschool corner

This ESD-supported preschool center started operation in 2002 Eth. C. The preschool has three regular teachers and 2 caregivers. The center has three sections of children of ages 4, 5 and 6years. Each section has its own well-equipped corners for learning and keeping play materials. The center supports children's development in four areas: physical, mental, psychological and social development. It prepares the children for transition to Grade one. The preschool is a feeder to an elementary school.

Children normally stay at the center the whole day. They bring their own lunch from their home. They have uniform. The local community has a great participation and involvement. For example, they pay care givers' salaries. The center has water and sanitary facilities [toilets]. Continuous assessment formats, attendance and other relevant preschool books are available at the center. Children who were transferred to grade one have portfolio filed at the preschool center. The center has already been handed over to the local government for sustainability.

### Birhan Vocational Skills Training Center

Birhan Vocational Skill Center was established by ESD to provide vocational training to young people in Debrebirhan Town. The aim of the vocational training center is to help the unemployed youth become self-employed through giving them appropriate training in various skills. The center was established in 2010. Since then, it has trained around 401 young people in various vocational skills and helped them to get employed. Some of the vocational trainings given at the center are: construction, food preparation, plumbing, weaving, poultry and sewing. The duration of the training ranges from 2-3 months. About 70% of the skills training is practice-based. Theory constitutes 30% of the training.

The training is conducted in collaboration with the local TVET office. Trainers are drawn from the Woreda TVET center. The trainees, after completing their skills training, are provided with basic tools. The center does this to help them start their own jobs. Other trainings like entrepreneurship, business skill, life skills, etc. are also given along with the vocational training. They have 15 days apprenticeships after completing the three-month long training. At

present, about 340 of the trained youth are employed in various areas.

### Questions, feedback and opinions on field visit

After the participants completed their visits to the selected sites, the conference facilitator asked them for feedback and discussion of their observations. Below is a summary of the issues raised.

- «We have seen the model pedagogical center in Debrebirhan. Do preschools use the pedagogical center materials available at the center? We have noted that training is given to teachers at the Resource Center. Do you regularly monitor that teachers use and apply the teaching aids in their respective schools? How is the experience sharing process of ESD with other regions in this regard? »
- « First of all, the task is very impressive and pleasant. Your program has demonstrated how to ensure sustainability. There are several good things in the pedagogical resource center. I suggest expanding the pedagogical resource center's service to the 'Mothers' group so that parents acquire lessons to produce teaching aids at home so that they can make use of it to teach their own children.»
- «We have observed that there is no sufficient circulation of air in the classrooms of Mesno Amba primary school. Classrooms are wide and sufficient space should be provided for children to rest. The female teacher explained to us about playing sessions, but we were not able to see playing corners in the classrooms. Playing corner is very important at this level. Why do children remove their shoes when they enter the classroom? This may not be good for their health. The chairs at the center are not comfortable for children. Most of them attend lesson standing up in the classroom. This needs attention.»
- « I suggest that children have birth certificate in the preschool. Local churches may help in this regard. Determining the age of some of the children in the center is not easy. »
- «The outdoor materials are made of wood. Some look expensive, however. Instead, consider using cheap materials that are locally available. In this way, the experience can be replicated elsewhere in the community.»
- «Home gardening should be encouraged to improve the children's nutrition.»
- «Women empowerment means ensuring sustainability. So, monthly sessions for parents can be developed in the ECCE, as we have observed elsewhere. This ensures sustainability of the program. (Expert from Plan Ethiopia)»
- «I really appreciate the tasks performed at field level. What I want to underline, as mentioned earlier, is the need for fair distribution of the teaching aids produced at the pedagogical resource center. For example, we have not observed similar teaching aid materials in Mesno Amba School. Either duplicating (when possible) or replicating the material might help. In Mesno Amba school attendance is good.»
- «We have observed that there are no books in level I preschool in Mesno Amba. There should be a corner for children. We have also witnessed that level I children are learning us-

ing level II children books. This needs correction as much as possible. Chacha Model Preschool can be a good center for others to learn from. It may be a good idea to have a similar model preschool in woredas like Seya-Deber-enawayu. There are over 45 preschool centers in the wereda, all facing shortage of learning materials. »

- «ESD has performed well in transition and the preschool is also good. I suggest that Level I preschool children in Mesno Ambabe provided with mats instead of chair. »
- «Development Expertise Center, in collaboration with Plan Ethiopia, uses five corners; namely, reading corner which contains English and Amharic; Mathematics corner; puzzle corner; building corner and sand corner. The corners may help for overall knowledge development of the child. In Chacha the facility is generally good but it could have been much better if the classrooms had met the regional education bureau's standard, i.e., 7m X 6m. There should be due consideration for children with special needs. Ramps should be provided for wheelchair users, (wherever applicable) or they should be fixed, for example. The centers should be all-child inclusive. Awareness creation has to be made in the rural community to support children with disabilities to come to schools. The other thing is the introduction of educational playing materials. Many more playing materials can be made using rubbers and tires. For example, in one of our projects, we use more than 18 kinds of children plays. Children have to use the materials produced in the Pedagogical Resource Center. Children in the preschool center have to get entertaining stories which are available in the resource center. Conducive environment has to be created where parents tell stories to children in the center. Daily lesson schedule has to be posted in all classrooms.»

## 7. Group discussion on the selected thematic issues

Discussing five selected themes was the focus of the third day session of the conference . The purpose of the session was to give the participants an opportunity to brainstorm further on what has been presented in the first two days of the conference in terms of what the participants were doing in their own specific context and what they could do instead. Participants were divided into five groups. Each group took one theme to discuss in depth and present it at the plenary. The selected themes [as presented elsewhere in this proceeding] are:

1. Government and community participation and engagement in ECCE intervention
2. Preschool teachers and care givers trainings
3. Localization /contextualization of ECCE curriculum and materials
4. Approaches to and modalities of ECCE intervention
5. ECCE transition to primary education

The following guiding questions were given to help focus the participants' attention on the lessons they could learn:

(i) What did you learn from ESD preschool proj ect activities?

(ii) What exemplary practices can be scaled up in your region

(iii) What would be the likely challenge in scal ing it up ?

(iv) What opportunities are available to over come the challenges?

(v) What do you recommend?

Facilitators of the conference circulated through each group, further clarifying issues wherever needed and hinting at the expected outcome of the group discussions. At the end of the group discussion, a plenary session, in which the groups presented the result of their discussion, was held. Below is the outline of the key points reported by the groups. To avoid redundancy, the points each group reported are merged and presented here.

Theme 1: Government and Community participation and engagement in ECCE intervention

### 7.1 Lessons learned from ESD preschool project activities

- Implementation is participatory - involves all stakeholders in the program.
- Experience sharing among project sites and partner schools is important.
- Ensuring community ownership enhances sustainability of the program.
- It is important to give gap-based training for teachers and supervisors.
- Social audit (need for Transparency and Testimonies) needs to be developed.
- Centers need to have playing corners in their compounds.
- Reading corners for children is an essential component of the program.
- Good to use various approaches (e. g., school-based, community-based, etc.).
- Good to Integrate other livelihood components with the program - e.g., the SHG approach
- Locally relevant preschool playing materials can be used
- There is a need for ECCE and preschool teachers joint training
- Consider setting up age appropriate pre school classroom
- Children security (in both preschool and primary ) is important

### 7.2. Exemplary practices to be scaled up in different places

- Recruiting teachers from the locality and giving them on-the-job training.
- Continuous training and refresher programs - Training for teachers of preschool completers [i.e. Grade 1 teachers], for supervisors & stakeholders.
- Use of local materials (many materials are cheap and available.)
- The availability and use of various learning corners
- Incentives for best performing teachers - School -based and community-based approaches.
- Integrating livelihood with the program - supporting children to eat-to-learn.
- Distributing locally produced materials and resource from a center.
- Training teachers involved in teaching pre school completers.
- Keeping ECCE profile (keeping their portfolio even after they joined primary school)
- The need for lunch box
- Teaching Mothers in the SHG to produce teaching/playing materials

- Community management of pre-school cen ters using elders & leaders,
- Establishment of model preschool centers, - Establishment of pedagogical resource center - Continuous training of teachers on how to produce learning and play materials

### 7.3. Likely challenges to be faced in scaling up?

- Shortage of budget in the system, even if there is a policy
- Various natural and man-made factors may challenge some communities
- Getting sustainable resource-support from communities may be a challenge.
- Preschool teacher supply is scarce.
- Unattractive preschool teacher selection criteria
- Inadequacy of incentives/salaries
- High preschool teacher turnover
- Perception/attitude problem: some think preschool education is not a priority.
- Inadequate monitoring and evaluation: - Woreda education offices may not prioritize ECCE
- Mixing the main curriculum with imported contents
- Limited skills and awareness of management bodies
- Low awareness of the community
- Trainers qualified in ECCE are in short supply
- Inaccessibility of some Weredas
- Commitment problem at different levels
- Large class size in grade one
- A tendency to exaggerate numbers reported

### 7.4. Opportunities

- There is a policy followed by Strategies and Guidelines
- There are pre-school classes in many schools as a means of implementing the policy.
- There are pre-school centers to serve as models of successful pre-school programs.
- Preschool teachers training are expanding -(improvement is desirable, though)
- Helpful research findings are available in the area to be consulted.
- Focus of the government on GTP V and ESDP V - Universities may soon begin training pre school teachers (e.g., Debre Tabor Univer sity has already started)
- Increasing public awareness (e.g., policy, strategy.)
- Growing government attention to the pro gram (e.g., policy, strategy.)
- Improvement in the relationship between parents, preschool teachers (caregiver)

### 7.5. Recommendations

- Making implementation of preschool pro gram evidence-based ( learning from experi ence]
- Creating/enhancing community awareness on the value of preschool
- Putting a qualified person (in pre-school ed ucation) to serve as a focal person at Woreda level.
- A Clear career structure (e.g. salary adjust ment, promotion, etc.) is needed for pre-

school teachers.

- Redefining selection criteria
- Alternative approaches to train preschool teachers.
- Recruiting teachers from the locality.
- Continuous in-service training and refresher courses for teachers.
- Putting more emphasis on the role of the government (policy issues)
- Putting into practice the strategies, guide lines and policies
- Involving private investors in teachers training through proper monitoring and evaluation - Assessing and improving the linkage between preschool curriculum and primary school curriculum
- Popularizing the policy further still
- Enhancing community awareness further still
- Lobbying the government to raise its finan cial commitment
- Localizing the curriculum through local pro duction of materials.
- Establishing Pedagogical Resource Center at Woreda level.
- Continuous awareness creation activity at all levels on ECCE policy
- Putting the strategy into practice
- Focusing more on overall child development than academic aspect only

Various important lessons can be drawn from the above extended report of the result of the discussions carried out by the participants of the study. Recommendations can also be made on each of the five themes of the conference. The next section has this to do.

## 8. Lessons learned and Implications

In the preceding sections various undertakings and activities that have taken place over the last three days of the conference have been summarized. It is now time to present a synthesis of the lessons learnt based on:

- the grass root level experiences of ESD;
- scholarly papers presented;
- reports of research on the 'impacts' of ESD-North Shewa project, and
- discussions of the practitioners' experiences based on the frameworks acquired during the Conference .

In this sections the five thematic areas of the Conference are used to present the lessons learned and the implications there from.

### a) Approaches and modalities of preschool education:

Multiple approaches and modalities of preschool education have been identified and discussed during the conference. The need to practice multiple approaches arose from the efforts ESD made to address demands of local situations. In particular, three different modalities of preschool implementations were observed. On the other hand, the Government has also introduced some important approaches to preschool program implementation. These are '0' class; child-to-child program, the conventional Kindergarten-type preschool, and the accelerated pre-school approach. In all cases, it is important for organizers of preschool education program to make sure that the modality they choose to use is locally relevant and useable in their context. This means,

quite simply, choosing and using the approach that adequately addresses the demands of our local context. And also the focus of the modality to be chosen has to be developing the 'whole' child, i.e. it has to target the mental, social, emotional and physical development of a child. This is what the preschool program is designed to serve. In fact, it should be made clear that preschool education program is not an end on its own. It has a mission to achieve. That mission is: preparing children mentally, socially, emotionally and physically for the next level of education. Therefore, the quality of the approach lies not in the label we give it but in what it can, if effectively implemented, do for the children.

### b) On government and community participation and engagement in ECCE

Community participation has a central role to play in the implementation of the policy of Early Childhood Care and Education program in Ethiopia. In this regard, ESD's success is a function of mobilizing the community and local administration. This develops sense of joint ownership of the project among the community. Sense of ownership guarantees sustainability of the project. Clearly, community-based planning, mentoring, supervising, monitoring and evaluating implementation activities are a few among the things to do to enhance community participate in preschool activities.

A wide range of challenges may characterize the implementation of preschool program. Perception of community members can be mentioned as an example. Some may have no awareness of the need for the program at all. Others may see preschool education as a luxury- something only the affluent family can do for their children. One way to take these people on board is through creating/raising awareness about the value of preschool education in preparing children not just for the next level but also for future life. Needless to say, teaching has a prominent role to play in creating positive attitude among community members.

In so doing, opening spaces for direct participation of community members in the program and involving community representatives in the center management could be taken as one promising measure in the initial stage of the program. Identification of knowledge/ skills gaps and building local capacity through, say, training, or demonstration of exemplary results are among the activities that help win the support of local community and the leadership. No doubt, this is the secret behind ESD's success, as has been noted over the last conference days.

### c) Preschool teachers and care givers [preparation and] trainings

Preschool teachers [care givers included] play significant roles in the achievement of the objectives of preschool education. Teachers' pre-service preparation and opportunities for continued professional development, with clear scheme for career growth, is said to be very essential. ESD recruited teachers from the local community and offered them induction courses at the initial stage of their acceptance into the program. This was followed by need-based in-service training. Such

a not-so-expensive capacity building strategy is a key to filling a missing link in the preschool teachers' knowledge and skills.

The quality of preschool teachers and other care givers is judged not just by the quality of their interaction with the children under their care but it is also judge in terms of the extent to which that interaction results in the desired development of the children.

One important challenge identified during the Conference was that there is a high turnover of preschool teaching staff. Such a quick coming and going of preschool teachers is perhaps an indication of the general lack of a promising career development in the sector. Addressing this may require to introduce a more practicable system in the sector.

The imbalance between the demand for and supply of preschool teachers has not come to surface as a significant problem in the ESD projects, but there were reported cases from other practitioners who took part in the Conference. Hence, the ESD approach to the recruitment and development of preschool teachers may be taken as a simple expedient approach but this should not postpone the search for a lasting solution to the problem.

The need for the inclusion of 'interaction with the child' in the preschool curriculum is another lesson worth learning from the issues raised during the conference. For this to successfully happen, there is going to be a need for teachers who themselves have a proper training in preschool curriculum and preschool teaching. As an interim solution, however, it may be wise to consider giving in-service training to psychology and pedagogy instructors and begin offering the training with them until more proper ECCE graduates make themselves appear in the field. Addis Ababa University has already started an MA program in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). This is an opportunity for all concerned to send their personnel for training.

The other important point raised during the Conference was that the capacities of the public training institutions are limited. This carries with it the implication for reconsidering the involvement of private training institutions in training preschool teachers and caregivers. This can be done perhaps through carefully, among others, crafted mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the program.

### d. Localization/contextualization of preschool curriculum and materials

It was learned during the Conference that both curriculum content and teaching (as well as play) materials are meaningful when they are culturally relevant. Besides, in such a move to aggressively extend preschool education, affordability for the community as well as for the government is an essential consideration. ESD has addressed this very well. This has been done through:

a) Establishing Pedagogical Resource Center, b) Training its own staff at Wolaita Montessori Preschool Center,

c) Producing materials at the center using the staff who received the training

d) Distributing the materials to preschool centers, and

**e) Training teachers on how to produce materials themselves in their own preschool context**

On the other hand, the studies presented during the Conference indicated that using exotic materials has been the major challenge particularly in the preschools run by private individuals. Hence, having the ESD-type Pedagogical Resource Center at least at each Woreda may serve in this regard. The skill to produce materials from what is locally available can also be developed in the preschool training centers.

### e. Transition from preschool to primary education:

Two major challenges came out regarding this theme: (a) gap between the preschool curriculum and the Grade 1 curriculum; and (b) teachers' lack of preparation to handle children from preschool and those who join school without attending preschool.

ESD has overcome the teachers' lack of preparation through training Grade 1 teachers on 'child handling' and 'curriculum adaptation'. The gap between preschool curriculum and the Grade 1 curriculum, however, is a challenge that has emerged largely from misunderstanding the purpose of preschool education. It should be emphasized that preschool education is not to teach academic subjects. In fact, it is needed to focus on socialization. However, as long as they are in preschool the children need to be exposed to the basics of literacy [reading and writing] and numbers [numeracy]. This can be taken as part of the socialization process. Hence, there is enough reason to consider these points as important points in discussing transition from preschool to school.

The papers presented as well as the reflections from the participants indicated that where it is the reality of our schools to have children with and without preschool experience in Grade 1, teachers need to be well versed in using differentiated instruction, instead of holding the children with preschool experience back. Producing some curriculum materials [aids] to increase the learning pace of these children can be something to think about, if affordable. If not, teachers can make instructional adaptations [with proper in-service support]. Training of Grade 1 teachers and primary school principals is an issue that deserves particular attention.

## 9. Concluding Remark by the Executive Director of ESD

**Dear Conference participants,**

We have been discussing matters related to ECCE over the last three days. Professionals connected to ECCE from a wide range of positions have come together and exchanged their precious views, practices and experiences. ESD has tried to evaluate and show its practical experiences at field level. The conference was also enriched by participants' reflections on field visits, group activities and discussions following paper presentations.

Clearly, ESD has made commendable efforts in implementing the ECCE program. We can-

not go any further due to financial limitations, however. So, the next question will be thinking about and working much harder to find ways we can further strengthen the involvement of the stakeholders in the ECCE implementation.

For this we are planning to conduct a dissemination conference during the first quarter of the year 2016. The purpose of the dissemination conference will be how to strategically move forward using the recommendations that arose from this conference and the lessons learned. It is expected that key stakeholders like, the Ministry of Education and the Regional State Education Bureaus, together with other stakeholders, will take a leading role in sustaining the ongoing program much further.

Thank you all again!

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## Annex I: List of participant organizations on the workshop

- FDRE Ministry of Education Departments
- FDRE Charities and Societies Agency
- Regional State Education Bureaus of Amhara, Oromia SNNPR, and Addis Ababa City Administration
- North Shoa Departments of Education and Finance and Economy Development
- Debrebirhan University
- Debrebirhan Teacher Education College
- Partner Local and International Organizations
- Partner School Heads and Teachers
- Teachers of Preschool Center
- Representatives of Beneficiary Children and Parents, and
- Early Childhood Education Committee Members at project intervention sites.

**Annex II: Conference taskforce members:**

- W/ro. Simret Mamo, from Kotobe University-College
- Ato Samuel Taddesse, from Plan International - Ethiopia
- Ato Samuel Asnake, from UNESCO - Ethiopia
- Ato Moges G/Mariam, from Aha Psychological Service PLC.
- Ato Kassahun Assefa, from private Consultancy Firm
- Dr. Ambissa Kenea, from Addis Ababa University

P