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# EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE) IN ETHIOPIA: DEVELOPMENTS, RESEARCH, AND IMPLICATIONS

*Belay Tefera*

**Abstract:** Early childhood care and education has been for many years in Ethiopia. However, these experiences were not systematized, reflected up on and, hence, efforts were not made to extract lessons and delineate future directions. This paper has made a modest attempt to bring to light developments registered, gaps noted and future areas of focus both in intervention and research. It examined the past and present of ECCE developments focusing on policies, programmes and curricula as well as implementation (modalities, government and parent involvement, coordination, monitoring) practices. Almost all available and accessible government documents, secondary data, and research reports in the field up until 2016 were consulted. Findings seem to suggest that although early years' education had longer presence and was, in due course, able to make significant strides in terms of design, implementation, as well as outcomes, it had, however, been noted to making little progress in terms of, for example, access, equity, quality, and relevance. ECCE in Ethiopia has still been noted to attracting tremendous research but critical, relevant, novel, and comprehensive investigations are yet to come. The paper outlined future directions of programmatic design, intervention and research to enhancing a more professional ECCE delivery in Ethiopia.

**Key words:** ECCE, Quality ECCE, ECCE Policy, ECCE Curriculum, O-Class, Child-to-Child, Traditional Education, Priest School, Quranic School...

## 1. INTRODUCTION

'Early Childhood Care and Education' (ECCE) is an umbrella term<sup>3</sup> (UNESCO, 2002) used for all interventions, services, and support (Britto et al., 2012 in UNESCO, 2002) to children aged eight years and below (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005: 2), their parents, and caregivers. The concept generally designates a holistic, integrated, comprehensive, developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive, and child-centred approach (UNESCO, 2006) to policy formulation, activity programming and service provision addressing health, nutrition, education, and developmental needs of children, their parents and caregivers (MoH, MoWA, MoH, 2010a). Envisaged in this manner, it is believed to generally contribute to children's survival, development and learning in formal, organized and sustained centre-based settings like "daycare centres", "kindergarten", "schools", and "nursery schools"

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<sup>3</sup>This umbrella term was used, for example, in the Jomtien declaration, the Dakar framework of Action, and the EFA GMR Strong Foundation (UNESCO, 2002).

(UNESCO- IICBA, 2010) as well as informal and non-formal (home and community) settings.

Conceived with the goal of enabling all children (age's birth to 8 years) develop and learn to full potential through effective support, ECCE bears the specific objectives of ensuring that parents and guardians have the attitudes, skills and knowledge to support the development (including care, learning, and protection) of children, that children aged 4-6 years are participating in programmes promoting cognitive, social, emotional and physical development, that effective school and community support are in place to ensure successful transitions to primary school, and that collective actions take place at community, districts and national level to meet the development needs of 0- 8 years- old children (MoE, MoWA, & MoH, 2010a, b, c; PIE, 2013).

In fact, the goals envisaged, conceptions held, programmatic components embraced, organizational set ups structured, and approaches pursued in early years education have historically been changing from such extremely traditional and adult-centred views and practices (in which children were treated as miniature adults requiring less care and more education, training, and academic skills) to a more child-centred ones in which children were believed to be qualitatively different from adults requiring holistic services (rather than just education alone) through child-centred approaches like play. In more recent years, such holistic early years education programmes are characterized more specifically to encompass (1) education related to basic learning skills (like pre-reading, pre-writing, pre-counting, and pre-arithmetic), (2) basic life skills (such as hand washing, good eating habits), (3) health care services (like supplementary nutrition, immunization), (4) monitoring growth and development of children with the participation of health workers, teachers, parents/ care givers, and (5) protection services for children from various types of violations and abuses (Delaney, 2012; DEP, 2001; UNESCO, 2006, 2010; MoH, 2006).

In line with this historical progressions of early years education, this paper attempts to survey experiences in Ethiopia across historical time beginning from its conception till the present. Briefly tracing its historical roots, the paper discusses ECCE designs (policies, programmes and curricula), implementations (modalities, statistics, governance, stakeholders' involvement, and monitoring and evaluation), and impacts (quality, access, equity, and relevance) over the years. By doing so, the paper documents achievements so far and delineates strengths to maintain, gaps to overcome, opportunities to exploit and future directions to pursue in ECCE design, provisions as well as research. Above and beyond these functions, this synthesis research report also serves as a bibliographic record of existing ECCE local research in Ethiopia nearly for the last three to four decades.

## 2. METHODS AND APPROACHES

**Data sources:** government documents, research reports, and secondary data were consulted for our present purpose. More specifically, our data sources included the following ten groups of sources:

1. Legal, policy, and related government documents: Constitution (FDRE, 1995), ECCE Memorandum of Understanding (MoE, MoWA, and MoH, 2010d), policies and guides (NCC, 1974b E.C.; MoE, 1994; MoE, 1995; MoH, 2002; MoE, MoWA, and MoH, 2010 a, b, c), curricula materials (MoE, 1973 E.C; MoE, 1998 E.C, MoE, 2001 E.C; MoE, 2006.), and ECCE standards (MoE, 2001 E.C.; MoE, 1995),
2. Education sector development programme documents: ESDP I (MoE, 1997), ESDP II, (MoE2002); ESDP III (MoE, 2005), and ESDP IV (MoE, 2010),
3. Education statistics annual abstracts from 1992 to 2005 E.C. (EMIS, 1999-2013),
4. Proceedings of conferences and seminars that include national seminar on Ethiopian children, their developmental needs, basic services provided, and problems (NCC, 1974a E.C.), conference on the situation of children and adolescents in Ethiopia (Habtamu, 1996), the Seventh National Conference of the Ethiopian Psychologists' Association on child rights, childhood education and the use of mother tongue in schools (Belay and Abebaw, 2007), the Sixth African conference on child abuse and neglect with focus on early childhood development and education, (ANPPCAN, 2009), and some reference to the national education conference of the College of Education and Behavioral Studies on (the status, challenges, and prospectus) early years care and education (CEBS, 2017) as the proceeding is not yet published. Other but international conferences containing relevant work on ECCE in Ethiopia were also referred to: CSAE conference on economic development in Africa at St. Catherine's College, Oxford ([www.csae.ox.ac.uk/conference/2011-EDAI/...](http://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/conference/2011-EDAI/...)), and international seminar at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research on early childhood care and education Trondheim, Norway (NTNU, 2014),
5. Database on Ethiopian Educational Research, 1974-1998, Institute of Educational Research, Addis Ababa University, Code Numbers 144, 146, 549,550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555,
6. Doctoral and MA Student Thesis on ECCE in Ethiopia done in the College of Education and Behavioral Studies and elsewhere until 2016,
7. Working papers, published articles (in Ethiopian Journal of Education, Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, and Early Childhood Education Journal) and published books,
8. Research reports submitted to and/ or done by Ministry of Education and related offices (MoE, 1971 E.C.; AAEOPU, 1978 E.C.; Hailesellasie et al. 1979 E.C., Eleni, 1980 E.C., MoE, Ministry of Education., 1995a; MoLSA and MoE, 1982 E.C.; Tirusew et al., 2007; Britto et al; 2012),
9. Individual researcher's reports (e.g. Demeke, 2003; Demeke, 2007b; Dereje, 2005),

**10.** Research reports submitted to and/ or done by local (e.g. APAP and FEAT, undated) and such international NGOs as UNESCO (UNESCO, 2006; UNESCO Cluster Office, 2006; UNESCO IBE, 2006; UNESCO-IICBA, 2010), World Bank (World Bank., 2000; Tirussew et al., 2001), Plan International (PIE, 2013), Save the Children (Ambachew, 2003; SCN, 2010; KES, 2012; FET, 2014), and Young Lives (Young Lives policy Brief, 2012; Pells and Woodhead, 2014).

Note that the abbreviations and acronyms of longer names of authors that are less familiar to the academic community are described while referencing them in the list of references; just at the beginning of the respective item in the entry list. As regards years of publications, both European and Ethiopian calendars are used as they appear in the documents referenced. While E.C. is added to the year of publication to denote the Ethiopian calendar, year of publication without such additions refers to the European calendar.

**Sampling:** since the purpose of the study is to create synthesis, identify gaps, and also document available research and materials in the area of ECCE, attempts were made to access all available reports and documents; hence, sampling was irrelevant here. The author deployed graduate students of his own for five years (2011 to 2015) to collect the documents as part of the requirements for their course projects. If there are missing items in our collection, it is inaccessibility, unavailability during source collection or an oversight.

**Approaches and procedures:** Data are synthesized first and foremost to present a historical background of ECCE followed by policies, programmes and curricula and then current ECCE modalities, statistics, and governance. ECCE researches are then synoptically presented to examining government and parent involvements and coordination and monitoring of ECCE. ECCE effectiveness (Access, equity, quality, relevance) and impacts are also examined employing these various research investigations. The paper concludes by making reflections on major features of ECCE (achievements, strengths and limitations) and future directions.

**Authenticity of the sources:** This study is not intended to conduct meta-analysis of the existing research on ECCE; which obviously requires verification of the authenticity of data, findings, and ideas contained thereof. Rather, the purpose is to survey what is being done to delineate achievements and gaps and then draw implication for future research. This would then mean that issues of validity and reliability of the empirical research findings are of little concern for us here. However, in order to ensure the integrity and credibility of this report, we would like to underscore the following in defence of the quality of the reviewed reports.

First and foremost, the ten groups of sources above seem authentic beyond any level of doubt because the data, findings, and ideas contained therein are complementing, corroborating, and enriching rather than contradicting one another. In fact, no report appeared conflicting to any other source

considered in this research. Furthermore, experience informs that careful, systematic, and controlled procedures are followed in the development of the documents and reports above. For example, the government documents and reports above (under category 1, 2, and 3) are issued for official use and it is believed that they were carefully prepared. In fact, to the knowledge of the author of this article, there has never been negative critiquing and complaints documented against these documents and reports so far. In the same way, conference papers are understandably of good quality because they go through rigorous quality assurance process. At the outset, screening is normally made out of the pool of papers. Then, the papers are presented in a conference, discussed and critiqued after presentations and then contributors are expected to resubmit revised versions for publishing the proceedings. Student theses are still believed to be of valuable input as they are conducted under closer supervision of experienced professors, presented and defended in a public viva voce and resubmitted incorporating feedback from internal and external examiners. Last but not least, local and such international NGO research reports are also credible because they are done deploying huge resources that demand closer monitoring during data collection. Such reports are also subjected to internal and external reviews in validation workshops.

### 3. A BRIEF HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

Ethiopia is a country with a long past of early years' traditional (priest and quranic) education<sup>4</sup>. However, the first modern pre-school (kindergarten) was established in 1898 for the children of French consultants who were helping build the first railroad in Ethiopia (Demeke, 2003) and then for a general public service much later in 1963 with pilot projects established in eight major Ethiopian towns (MNCDSA Report, 1972). ECCE development then went through a gradual and slower expansion until the 1974 socialist revolution that heralded remarkable changes in the history of early childhood education in Ethiopia. It was believed that the success of the revolution would not be possible without the full participation of women in the public spheres and this required many childcare centres and kindergartens to be launched so that women could be freed from routine childcare. The recognition given to this early years' education was noted from the fact that the former President, Colonel Mengistu H. Mariam, had paid a visit to KGs in Sidamo, Bale, Arsi, and North Shoa on March 28/29,

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<sup>4</sup>...early years' education in Ethiopia dates back to the turn of centuries basically rooted into the three religious movements: the introduction of Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> century in the Northern Ethiopia that initiated preschools to teach...basic literacy..., the expansion of Islam in 7<sup>th</sup> century that introduced Quranic schools to teaching early Arabic reading to Muslim children in Eastern Ethiopia ..., and the evangelical movement initiated in the 1950s that contributed to the expansion of early years schooling particularly in Southern and Western Ethiopia...(cited in Belay and Hawaz,2015).

1971 E.C and later issued directives to strengthen these centres. Then, a committee was set up from relevant centres so as to prepare a curriculum for nursery and pre-schools, review the state of KGs and the government and non-government administrators, and prepare a budget plan to launch model KGs to be located in Addis Ababa (MoE, 1971 E.C).

These and related subsequent measures eventually resulted in a tremendous rise in the number of KGs as well as enrollment of children from only 77 KGs accommodating 7, 573 before the revolution to a total of 912 KGs with 103,000 children after the revolution. During this period, major changes also emerged in the expansion of pre-schools location-wise; a tendency to move towards the rural areas along the then National Literacy Campaign (MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C). Moreover, for the first time in the history of the Country, pre-school education became part of the national education policy (NCC, 1974b E.C.) having its own national pre-school curriculum in 1973 E.C (MoE, 1973 E.C.) which was evaluated and revised in 1983 (Bizunesh, 1983). Professional preparation of teachers began almost a decade later (in 1986) with the support of UNICEF at Menen School, Addis Ababa.

In addition to these major changes, three separate departments were established within the new Ministry of Education each taking charge of training of teachers, curriculum and textbook preparation, and supervision and evaluation of pre-school programmes. Research, workshops and conferences were also conducted including the national seminar organized by the National Children's Commission to discuss the developmental needs, services, and concerns of children (NCC, 1974a E.C.), assessment of the general situation of KGs in Addis Ababa (AAEOPU, 1978 E.C.), evaluation of the situation of six government pre-schools administered with MoE budget (Hailesellasié, Eleni, and Tsige, 1979 E.C), and examination of activity performance of stakeholders (MoLSA, Children, Family, Youth Organization-the former NCC, MoE, Public Organizations, Faith Based Organizations) with respect to pre-school education, problems experienced, measures taken, and plan of action (MoLSA and MoE, 1982 E.C). It was obvious that although pre-school education had a long past, its development was slow. Following the socialist revolution, the Ethiopian Workers' Party and the Government gave due attention to the sector. It was found that many organizations were involved in pre-school education including MoLSA, Children, Family, and Youth Organization-the former NCC, MoE, public organizations (city dwellers' associations, peasant associations, women's associations...), faith-based organizations (FBO), international organizations, and private organizations (MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C).

With the fall of the Socialist Regime, the Ministry of Education of the present Government came up with a different view regarding ECCE. That is, the Ministry stated in its first ESDP document (MoE, 1997) that even though the importance of pre-school education is believed to be

tremendous, it may not be an absolute necessity for children to pass through it as children can get the required skill and knowledge informally from their families. It was stated that pre-primary school was not a priority of the government under the depressive economic condition the country found itself in by then. It was, therefore, suggested that this early years' programme service be availed through private, public, religious and other organizations at least for those children whose parents could afford tuition fees. The same stance of marginalizing ECCE continued both in ESDP II (MoE, 2002) and ESDP III (MoE, 2010). This changed view has negatively impacted on the government subsidized community ECCE centres that mushroomed in the mid-1980s. As a result, these easily accessible and affordable ECCE centres for the low income families started to dwindle rapidly because of financial setback resulting in a very low salary rate as well as scarcity of resources (Tirussew, 2007). In the same way, community-based pre-school programmes innovated in rural Ethiopia quite later also failed mainly because of lack of community awareness about the significance of sustaining the programmes, administrative problems (that lacked a bottom-top-bottom coordination of activities and inability of the different parties to perform their duties), and lack of systematic follow up during the implementation of the programmes (Demissie, 1996).

While there was a low priority of concern on the part of the Government, a number of pre-schools were, however, noted slowly emerging particularly in urban areas but supported primarily through non-governmental agencies, private individuals, religious institutions and other organizations. Nevertheless, only very small children were able have access to such pre-schools, as many of them required paying tuition fees.

Such unexpected gradual expansion of pre-schools in the cities sent a message to the Government that its involvement was inevitable, to say the least, for standardizing, coordinating and regulating ECCE; lest the crisis that gradually started creeping into the system as a result of ECCE commercializing would shortly unfold itself into a great and full-fledged public concern. The international child rights movements that came along with UN CRC and 'EFA' goals also put an added pressure on the Government not to continue marginalizing the early years' education any longer. These internal and external pressures seemed to give an awakening call to the Government in recent years to involve in the sector by designing directives and programmes as well as overseeing implementations in different ways. This changed attitude of the government was noted in ESDP IV where goals and strategies were delineated for the first time (MoE, 2010); that also clicked the door for policy formulation.



#### 4. POLICIES, CURRICULA, AND STANDARDS OF ECCE

The international child rights movement that eventually led to the formulation of UNCRC and its endorsement by different nations (including Ethiopia) laid a strong foundation for the design and implementation of ECCE. The first recognition of children's rights by the Government was evident in the Constitution of the country (FDRE, 1995) where in Article 36 it recognized the right of the child to education; though these rights didn't mention pre-school education as a right in itself. Ethiopia's National Education and Training Policy (MoE, 1994), however, recognized pre-school education and stated that it will focus on all rounded development of the child in preparation for formal schooling" (p.14)<sup>5</sup>. Following this Education and Training Policy (MoE, 1994), the Ministry of Education also developed a twenty-years (1997-2016) indicative plan in 1997 covering all levels and areas of education, all tiers of governments and all forms of expenditures with the aim to improving access, quality, equity and budget at all levels of education within the country (MoE, 1997; MoE, 2002; MoE, 2007; MoE, 2010). While the first and second ESDP plans failed to consider ECCE as absolutely necessary, ESDP III (MoE, 2005) planned to review and revise curriculum and standards, the content of the programmes to be delivered, training of teachers, safety standards, and other aspects of the programme. In fact, ESDP IV (MoE, 2010) even came up with a better package to give meaningful space for ECCE presence including intentions to expand ECCE.

In 2009, Early Childhood Education Action Plan/syllabus was published by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009) for ECCE centres to follow. This document gives the centres a direction on how to handle children in their premises and help them develop and acquire basic skills. The syllabus gives direction to the caregivers in four special focus areas and concept. These four core areas are physical development, positive relationship with others, proper utilization of language, utilization of numeracy and mathematical knowledge in relation to the daily routines and understanding of and interaction with environment (MoE, 2009).

At about this same period, a "breakthrough experience opening a glimmering opportunity" (Boakye, 2008) for children was the development of the National ECCE Policy Framework (MoE, MoWA & MoH, 2010) after its "long incubation period" (Boakye, 2008) and analysis of the state of conditions of ECCE in Ethiopia (MoE, 2007). An important part of the

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<sup>5</sup>According to this Policy, this education has a significant role in introducing children to basic learning skills that are needed in primary schools and enhance their chances of success in the education system. The Education and Training Policy of the government contains provisions concerning the kindergarten structure, curriculum development and teacher training programs to meet the educational needs of children. Although, only limited number of teachers are trained.

process was the UNICEF-sponsored national ECCE survey that attempted to assess the status of ECCE in almost all the regions delineating the way forward for policy formulation (MoE, 2007). Pre and post assessment validation workshops were held followed by establishment of a professional ECCE task force for designing the ECCE policy documents. This task force was able to come up with the draft policy document considering the recommendation of the national assessment. In fact, there was neglect in the policy design of an important recommendation in the national assessment that there is a need to revitalize low cost community-based centres like the priest schools and quaranic schools. This could possibly be out of misunderstanding that these centres are religious-based and wouldn't fit for a secular state.

This policy document states that ECCE is a joint undertaking of three line ministries<sup>6</sup> that ultimately got into force through the signing a memorandum of understanding on this joint venture along with respective duties and responsibilities (MoE, MoWA, and MoH, 2010d), deliberate on and endorse the final draft National Policy document (MoE, MoWA, and MoH, 2010a) as well as two other subsequent ECCE documents: Strategic Operation Plan (MoE, MoWA, and MoH, 2010 b) and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (MoE, MoWA, and MoH, 2010c). Although the development of ECCE policy document can not be taken as a miraculous event but rather a natural outcome of the socio-historical events that took place domestically and globally (Boakye, 2008)<sup>7</sup> and also that the Ethiopian government had responded to the development of a policy framework long after many African countries, this policy was of course considered as a triggering factor for ECCE to take off (Boakye, 2008).

The policy framework was designed on the basis of the National Education and Training Policy, the National Health Policy, the National Nutrition Strategy and the National Policy and Legal Framework on Child Rights (MoE, MoWA, and MoH, 2010 a). The synergy between the three ministries is especially a cornerstone that would enable to undertake systematic and holistic interventions. As Boakye noted such holistic

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<sup>6</sup>These ministries are Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth Affairs (MWCYA) and Ministry of Health (MoH).

<sup>7</sup>A number of push and pull factors prompted the development of the policy document. The 1998 conference by African Ministers of Education (UNESCO, 1998), the steady and unprecedented support given by development partners such as the UNICEF and the World Bank to the sector created sense of urgency in Ethiopia to formulate sector wide and developmentally appropriate ECD policy that involved main stream ministries. The crisis Ethiopian education system is facing in terms of drop outs especially at primary level, the situation of orphans and vulnerable children for instance due to HIV/AIDS, and an obligation for the government to ensure the wellbeing and development of children in light of MDG and EFA goals are all push factors that contributed to the inception and formulation of the policy framework.

approach would shift the status of early childhood care and education from “survival to development, from needs to rights, and from sector-based thinking to cross-sectional” (Boakye, 2008; P.175).

The National Policy framework stipulates four basic pillars of early childcare and education service delivery. These four pillars are parental education, health and early stimulation programme (prenatal to 3+years), pre-schools and community based kindergartens (4-6+years), and community-based non-formal school readiness programmes including the child-to-child initiatives (MoE, MoWA, and MoH, 2010, p. 1) and, of course, the primary school attached O- classes. It is stated that play is used as the main means of enhancing the child’s learning experiences. The mother tongue or the language spoken in the catchments area will be used as medium of teacher/caregiver-child interaction, as it is the best instrument towards realizing the full potential of the learner (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Although the ECCE Policy may be a more recent phenomenon, the curriculum has in fact made a prior appearance. The first ECCE curriculum was put in place in 1973 E.C (MoE, 1973 E.C). This curriculum comprised of seven subjects<sup>8</sup> that enhance the child’s development<sup>9</sup>. Because the curriculum was developed during the Socialist Regime, the objectives of the curriculum emphasized building socialist character rather than individualistic ones. The implementation of this curriculum was evaluated (Bizunesh, 1983) and subsequent revision was made (MoE, 1999) hopefully accommodating the outcomes of this evaluation. The revised curriculum for pre-school education suggested that the assessment process in pre-schools should not be carried out only by the main pre-school teacher but in collaboration with the assistant teachers and parents. This curriculum served for 9 years and then was revised in 2006 (that is, MoE, Ginbot 1998 E.C). Strictly speaking, this curriculum was not a new one; it is rather a revised version of the previous ECCE curriculum. This edition comprised five subjects instead of seven<sup>10</sup>. Acknowledging that play had previously been offered independently, the second edition had also incorporated it in each subject<sup>11</sup>. However, this curriculum was discipline-

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<sup>8</sup>These subjects include language (mother tongue), mathematics, environmental education, daily life skills, manual work, physical education, and music.

<sup>9</sup>The objectives of the curriculum were to enhance the child’s sense organs, to improve the child’s language and help him to express himself/herself freely, to lay the ground work of discipline, social work, and taking responsibility, and to inculcate in the child the concepts of patriotism and sacrifice.

<sup>10</sup>These five subjects are Amharic, English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, and Aesthetics & physical education.

<sup>11</sup>In general, the second edition clearly put that play should be an important feature of the curriculum in general and each and every syllabus in particular. It also gave recognition to the role of teachers in diversifying the use of play in implementing the curriculum.

based and fitted more to children above pre-school, and didn't meet pre-schoolers' interest to learn and learning styles and teaching methods (MoE, 2009). Hence, it was revised three years later in 2009. In the curriculum developed in 2009 (MoE, Ginbot 2001 E.C.), a new and more child-friendly approach was followed. This curriculum was believed to comprise learning domains that are developmentally organized, integrated, competence-based, and employed participatory methods<sup>12</sup>. This effort exerted by the Ministry of Education to design curriculum and ensure uniformity in the implementation of ECCE in the country has been encouraging. However, daily observations and experience indicate that there are dissimilarities among the curricula used by pre-schools/ kindergartens such that some pre-schools particularly those in the private sector were found using foreign curricula other than the MoE's (MOE, 2006).

Having designed ECCE curricula materials, the Ministry of Education has also set out standards for implementing and monitoring ECCE at different periods<sup>13</sup>. The first ECCE standard was issued during the Socialist Regime (NCC, 1974b E.C.) along with a pre-school education teachers' guide (NCC, 1974b E.C.). The next standard for pre-school (or kindergarten) programme and primary education was published in 1995 (MoE, 1995); a year after the issuance of the education and training policy. According to the description included in the introductory section, "the standard was prepared to implement the teaching learning process based on the new education and training policy (p. 3)." This standard generally presents detailed set of requirements that the Ministry of Education expects to see in any kindergarten or pre-school<sup>14</sup>.

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*Teachers could add plays other than the ones included in the subjects as the latter could not be enough given the age of the children (see Ministry of Education, MOE, 2006).*

<sup>12</sup>*Contents were organized under five chapters: physical, motor, and sensuous development; social and interpersonal development; language use and development; development of understanding mathematical concepts, and understanding the environment.*

<sup>13</sup>*Such standards specify aims and meanings, administrative structure, norms and rules, personnel and their respective duties and responsibilities, and requirements of a proper KG etc. with the purpose of making services to children uniform across KGs in the country and ensure their qualities, as well as enabling stakeholders understand their duties and responsibilities.*

<sup>14</sup>*The standard set by the Ministry of Education for preschools specifies that kindergarten program is a two-year preschool program that serves children between the ages of four and six. It also indicates that kindergartens serve children with and without special needs at two levels: level one for children 4-5 years old and level two for children 5-6 years old. According to the standard, one preschool program year (calendar) extends in the range of 203-206 working days divided in two semesters. Furthermore, the length of a period is 25 minutes (for children aged 4-5 years) or 30 minutes (for children aged 5-6 years old). Moreover, the standard describes the requirements pertaining to the preschool*

## 5. ECCE PROGRAMMES

Many organizations and stakeholders have been involved in ECCE at all times in Ethiopia (MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C., Hoot et al., 2004; Young Lives Policy Brief, 2012; Britto et al., 2012). Hence, the programmes of early childhood care and education considerably vary in terms of structures as well as processes (Woodhead et al., 2009). They range from the long standing traditional church and quaranic early childhood education institutions to modern pre-school programmes crafted along the Euro-American types. The most common type of ECCE programme that is widely known in Ethiopia at the moment is the pre-school programme for children aged 4 to 6 years. Such provisions are common in urban centres; mainly benefiting those from economically better families (Tirussew et al., 2007; UNESCO, 2006; Young Lives, 2012; Woodhead et al. 2009). They are foreign-based in terms of design (curriculum and textbooks), languages (mainly English, French, and Arabic), and resources (Demeke, 2007; Tirussew et al; 2007). More importantly, they tend to appeal to the aspirations and appetite of parents so that they would feel comfortable paying for tuition fees.

Realizing absence of such programmes in rural Ethiopia, some NGOs have been piloting ECCEs for rural areas with the purpose to establishing some model ECCEs for possible scale up by the government (Teka and Belay, 2015). Some preliminary observations indicate that such centres would make important impact on and contributions of communities, parents, and, of course, the children (Fromseas, 2014). However, some concerns were noted challenging the practice as well: resources constraints, child absenteeism, exclusion of children with special needs, tendency to devalue some useful community values and practices, and, more fundamentally, scalability and sustainability concerns (Teka and Belay, 2015). On the other hand, existence of civic societies with long years of ECCE experience, guiding (legal, administrative, and academic) frameworks, ECCE administrative structure, experiences of sister ECCE establishments in urban Ethiopia, social and cultural resources and partners in the communities, and some early sustainability measures of the pilot ECCE programmes were the opportunities identified to enable implementing such programmes (Teka and Belay, 2015).

Realizing the serious limitations of access to a greater majority of children, the Ministry of Education introduced a low cost, community-based one

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*environment, size of the compound and classrooms, facilities, offices, toilets, dining room, kitchen, first aid kit, etc. The standard further describes play and educational materials necessary for preschool program. In sum, the standard describes many important elements that need to be fulfilled by kindergartens. This standard was also revised in 2009 (MoE, 2001 E.C.) making it more compatible to the new ECCE policy.*

year school readiness programmes for children aged 6 years. These programmes are the “Child-to-Child Initiative” and government primary schools attached O-classes. While the “Child-to-Child Initiative” was articulated in the policy, the O-Class appears an afterthought of the policy possibly dictated by the demand on the ground. All the ECCE programmes have considerably improved general gross enrollment from 2.1 % in 1990- at the time the present government ascended to power (EMIS, 1990)- to a total of 26% in 2013 (EMIS, 2013)<sup>1</sup>; though this still means that only 1 out of 4 children is getting the service in Ethiopia while 3 are still not served at all. In fact, some preliminary assessments have indicated that both approaches (Child-to-Child and O-Class) have high prospect of scalability and feasibility in Ethiopia and better suited for rural areas (Belay and Belay, 2016; Britto et al., 2012), but were found incarcerated with lots of implementation problems that cloud on these possibilities (Belay and Belay, 2016; Britto et al., 2012). Hence, in order to address the problem of, among others, ECCE access, some researchers suggest the need to revitalize the community-based schools, such as for example, the priest schools (Demeke, 2007; Tirussew et al., 2007).

It is worth mentioning at the same time that although there is commitment on the part of the different sectors to promote early childhood care and education as expressed in the policy documents, the conditions of children’s care, nourishment, stimulation and education in Ethiopia has lots of concerns to be addressed. For example, early care and stimulation programme for children of 3 years and less is proposed to be done in a holistic manner involving parents through parent education. It is stated that this parent education shall be provided non-formally through individual or house-to-house visits, community meetings with adult literacy, community development and health extension workers, and/or using the different ECCE programme establishments (e.g. pre-schools and child-to-child initiatives) as entry points. Hence, different organizations (NGOs), pre-schools, and offices (education, health, agriculture, and women’s affairs) are to involve in implementing the parent education programmes. The serious problem has been, however, that these different organizations work under unclear boundaries, responsibilities, collaborations, accountabilities and coordination that would mean total neglect in some areas or repetitive work in others that may even lead to exhaustion and apathy among parents. In fact, centred-based private daycare services were also emerging in some urban areas like Addis Ababa (Hawaz, 2012; Martha, 2013; Belay and Hawaz, 2015) that were most welcomed by many parents (Martha, 2013) but were found to experience some technical, administrative and professional drawbacks (Belay & Hawaz, 2015).

## 6. ECCE RESEARCH AND LESSONS

### 6.1 General Overview

ECCE in Ethiopia has attracted different local and expatriate researchers and organizations (governmental and non-governmental) that conducted research in the field independently and jointly. Some of these studies were conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for MA and doctoral degrees in psychology, special needs education, and education. The issue of early childhood education was felt so important that different (government and non-government) organizations were also found organizing national and international conferences exclusively devoted to discussing scientific papers in ECCE. For example, in the 1980s, the National Children's Commission has organized a national seminar on Ethiopian children, their developmental needs, basic services provided, and problems experienced (NCC, 1974a E,C). In the early 2000s, the Ethiopian Psychologists' Association had devoted its Seventh National Conference exclusively to child rights, childhood education and the use of mother tongue in schools with an attempt to bring to light the westernization of childhood issues in Ethiopia and the need to take an inward looking approach to reconstructing the Ethiopian child (see Belay & Abebaw, 2007). In about the same time, ANPPCAN Ethiopia (2009), in collaboration with the head quarter, also devoted its 6<sup>th</sup> international African conference of Child Abuse and Neglect to Early Childhood Development and Education where by African experiences were brought to the fore through different scientific papers. More recently, the College of Education and Behavioral Studies of the Addis Ababa University has also conducted a very comprehensive, educative, and enriching national conference on "Building the foundations: status, challenges, and prospectus of early years care and education" in Hawassa from May 11-15, 2017 (CEBS, 2017)<sup>15</sup>.

The published and unpublished papers presented in these conferences and other academic forums unveil that research in early childhood education in Ethiopia is diverse in nature and started as early as the beginning of modern early years' education itself. Many of these studies centred on the status, situation, or practices of early childhood education during the socialist

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<sup>15</sup> *The conference proceeding is yet to come but looking into the copy of the material containing the abstracts, we can see that twenty nine scientific papers were presented that can be classed in to six sub themes: justification or rationale for ECCE, international and national experiences (perspectives, themes, approaches, and practices), empirical research focusing on local ECCE practices (e.g. learning through play, assessment practices, gender issues, and stakeholder engagements), missing issues in ECCE design and conduct, ECCE programmatic interventions (for children with special needs, computer-based learning, and improving developmental outcomes and classroom interactions), and analysis of policy matters and the Ethiopian ECCE policy (CEBS, 2017).*

regime (MoE, 1971 E.C.; 1995a; NCC, 1974a E.C.; AAEOU, 1978 E.C.; Hailesellasiye, Eleni, and Tsige, 1979 E.C.; MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C.; Tirussew, 1979), early years of the EPRDF government (Dereje, 1994; Habtamu, 1996; Hoot et al., 2004; UNESCO, 2006; Szente, 2007; Tirussew et al., 2007) and more recently in Ethiopia in general (MOE, 2010; Britto et al., 2012; Sophia, 2014; Hoot et al., 2004; Tirussew, 2007; Tirussew et al., 2007; UNESCO, 2006; CEBS, 2017) as well as in specific settings like Addis Ababa (1978 E.C., Hailesellasiye, 1979 E.C), Robe (Tesema, 2012), Nekemte (Dinke, 2014), and Guji (Tadesse, 2014). Other related studies were rather thematically focused as in history (Demeke, 2003, 2007; Hoot et al., 2004) and philosophy (Demeke, 2003) of early childhood education, educational and health hazards (Assefa, 2009), kindergarten curriculum (Bizunesh, 1983), mother-child relational behaviors (Teka, 1996) and behavior management practices (Tsehay, 2013), organization and leadership (Eleni, 1980 E.C.), teacher-related issues (Hoot et al., 2006; UNESCO-IICBA, 2010), materials and literature (Alasebu, 1981; Azeb, 1982; Zerihun, 1996; Dereje, 2005), vocabulary (Elias, 1995) and use of mother tongue education (Alem, 2007), new ECCE initiatives of school readiness (Maekelech, 2009) and daycare services (Belay & Hawaz, 2015; Hawaz, 2012; Martha, 2013), and factors affecting ECCE like child labor (Tirussew et al., 2001; Woodhead et al. 2009). Some studies were made to launch ECCE (MoE, 1971 E.C; Tirussew et al., 2007; SCN, 2010; PIE, 2013), examine feasibility of implementation (Britto et al., 2012), ECCE quality (Tirussew, 1998; Fantahun, 2013; Girma, 2014; Tassew, 2011; FET, 2014; World Bank, 2000; Desta and Azmeraw, 2009; KES, 2012; Fromseas, 2014), and impacts of psychosocial interventions (Tirussew, 1998) and programmes of the different non-governmental organizations including experiences of Save the Children Alliance (Ambachew, 2003), the community-based organization programme of the Arada, Gulele and Yeka Sub Cities of Addis Ababa (APAP & FEAT, un), the community-based pre-school programme implemented in rural Ethiopia (Demissie, 1996), and the community-based early childhood development programme of Ada'a Woreda (Desta & Azmeraw, 2009).

We shall briefly present major findings below under 'stakeholders' involvement', 'effectiveness of ECCE' (access, equity, quality, and relevance), and ECCE impacts.

## 6.2 Primary Stakeholders (Government and Parent) Involvement

**Government Involvement:** Although the government was involved in the design of the national framework, guidelines and plans, and took different measures to implement ECCE, there is absence of a well-established, mandated body and dedicated structure both at the federal and regional bureau of education to ensure the quality and standard of the training, lack of coordination on the part of the various organs of the education sector to monitor and inspect the activities are some of the problems that hamper



ECCE programmes in the country (MoE, 2010). There is also absence of a separate body at the Ministry of Education responsible for pre-primary education (Dereje, 1994; MoE, 2010; Tessema, 2014). Regional, woreda and kebele levels had minimal involvement and need to work jointly to identify and support current ECE providers (Britto et al., 2012). There is extremely limited government funding available for the plans in the framework and hence the implementation of ECCE risks placing a significant burden on an already overstretched primary education system (Young Lives Policy Brief, 2012). There is lack of commitment from the part of the government to expand and support this subsector, especially as a large majority of people live under poverty line, and limited or no role of the government in the sector denies many children to access the programme (MoE, 2010; Dinke, 2014) since the government is not financing pre-school education, it was reported that there is no budget allocated to this sub sector.

**Parental involvement:** Non-existence of communication between parents and teachers, limited or absence of parental involvement, need to educate the public on the importance and contribution of early childhood education (NCC, 1974a E.C; Tirussew, 1979; Alasebu, 1981, Bizunesh, 1984; MoE, 2010, Dinke, 2014; Tessema, 2014). It has also been noted that although the government and society have not attached value to the programme (Dereje, 1994) and there has still been a gradual awareness about the role of early childhood care and education in the smooth transition of children to the next level of education, this awareness has not been translated into concerted action by government (MoE, 2010).

### 6.3 Coordination and Follow Up

**Monitoring and supervision:** mechanism of programme follow-up and assessment have not been developed (Dereje, 1994), better ways of supervision and enforcement should be designed and implemented (Habtamu, 1996), there is lack of monitoring to maintain the standard of the curriculum and other facilities in pre-schools and also in the training of pre-school teachers (UNESCO-IICBA, 2010), there is no supervision to ensure that guidelines are followed in the pre-school setting (Britto et al., 2012; Tessema, 2014), lack of monitoring to maintain the standard of the curriculum and other facilities and activities in pre-schools and also in the training of pre-school teachers (NCC, 1974a E.C; MoE, 2010; UNESCO-IICBA, 2010).

**Coordination and inter-sectorality, partnership:** lack of cooperative ventures with local people (Bizunesh, 1984), problem of ECCE ownership (MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C), coordination among the various government organization (i.e. MoLSA, MoE, NCC) that are involved in ECE (MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C), integrated efforts among the three sectoral ministries (Belay and Hawaz, 2015, p.), coordination on the part of the various organs

of the education sector (MoE, 2010), working inter-sectorally (with different stakeholders) because of conflicting agendas and the lack of incentives and guidelines for cooperation (Britto et al., 2012), and partnership with multi-sectoral bodies that are proximal to the communities (Britto et al., 2012) were the problems hampering a synchronized strategic planning at the national level, proper data collection, reporting and coordination of activities (MoE, 2010).

#### **6.4 ECCE Effectiveness (access, equity, quality, relevance) and Impacts**

**Access, equity:** Research has consistently shown that ECCE access has been quite limited so far. This limited access was also shown to suffer from concerns of equity. There is, to begin with, regional disparity ranging from 40.3 per cent in Addis Ababa to 0.5 percent in Afar (UNESCO-IICBA, 2010). ECCE is basically inaccessible to the urban poor and rural children. Many rural children in Ethiopia are deprived of opportunities (Tirussew, 2007; Tirussew et al., 2007; Hoot et al., 2004; MoE, 2010) as in, for example, children in Argoba (Assefa, 2009), Guji (Tadesse, 2014), Klinto (PIE, 2011), Lay Armachio and Chilga (SCN, 2010) communities who were reportedly lacked access of any kind and, hence, alternatively engaged in herding cattle, farming activities, and paid work from an early age (Tirussew et al., 2001; Young Lives Ethiopia, 2012). Children with disabilities and ethnic and linguistic minorities were even much excluded and efforts to addressing them were minimal (Britto et al., 2012; Tessema, 2014; Dinke, 2014). Fourth, there has been a lack of daycare services hampering mothers from public and professional participation (MoLSA & MoE, 1982) except for some emerging centres in Addis Ababa (Hawaz, 2012; Martha, 2013; Belay and Hawaz, 2015).

Research investigations have also suggested the need for some alternative modalities of improving access and equity including the following:

- Strengthen public, faith-based and non-governmental organizations (MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C),
- Employ in rural areas alternative structures for ECCE that rely less on primary schools, such as community-based schools not attached to pre-schools, or rapid school readiness programmes (Young Lives Ethiopia, 2012),
- Put in place structures in urban areas that ensure poorer children can access non-government providers, either through direct subsidy to providers in poor communities or vouchers issued to parents (Young Lives Ethiopia, 2012),
- Explore feasibility of integrating ECCE and the HEW system in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health (Britto et al., 2012),

- Strengthen pre-schools attached to primary schools and O-Classes as they have broad stakeholder support and feasible entry points for ECE in most regions (Britto et al., 2012),
- Develop and launching family-based childcare and management at a national level (Tirussew, 1998),
- Community-based intervention between poor groups and neighborhood is needed to create friendly school environment, bridge the gap between families and schools, organize out-of school programmes, and introduce child guidance programme at primary school (Tirussew, 1998),
- Ensure CBOs involvement in the provision of ECCE through extensive engagement in community level ECCE policy awareness, strengthening governance structure at all levels, piloting CBO-managed ECCE centres, and developing the overall institutional competence of CBOs (APAP and FEAT, undated).

**Quality:** Quality concerns extend across a range of issues including design, implementation, resources, and governance and related others. National surveys (UNESCO, 2006; Tirussew et al., 2007) have pinpointed a number of issues that jeopardize quality of ECCE in Ethiopia. To mention some, there is developmentally inappropriate teaching and use of either under or over qualified teaching staff (UNESCO, 2006; Tirussew et al., 2007), unhealthy competition among private pre-school education centres (Tirussew et al., 2007; MoE, 2010), lack of clear guidelines on the linkages between pre-school and primary education (MoE, 2010), and quality of services is lower (Dereje, 1994; Fantahun, 2013; Tessema, 2014; Dinke, 2014) in both private and governmental pre-schools than the criteria in the ECCE standards (Habtamu, 1996), the expectations in the operational plan and national framework (Tessema, 2014), and the level of pre-school quality set by GGA (Fantahun, 2013); though private pre-schools showed better quality in comparison with governmental pre-schools (Fantahun, 2013).

Researchers indicate that pre-school education is not based on the natural laws of development that are an essential component of the child's educational basis (Alasebu, 1981), did not consider the holistic development and learning needs of the children (Dinke, 2014), all the developmental needs of the child were not fully identified (Tirussew, 1979), particularly the social and emotional aspect of development (Tirussew, 1979) and moral education (CYFWO, 1988; Tirussew, 1979) were most neglected, the curricular reforms that attempted to integrate HIV/AIDS into education starting from the first cycle i.e. from grade 1 to 4 is not included for pre-school (MoE, 2010). There is limited awareness of the existence of the national curriculum beyond the central level (Britto et al., 2012), implementation of the national KG curriculum was not carried out efficiently (Bizunesh, 1983; Young Lives Ethiopia, 2012; Britto et al.,

2012) and uniformly (MoE, 2010; Britto et al., 2012) with technical support and structures to ensure compliance across the range of providers in the sector (Young Lives Ethiopia, 2012; Britto et al., 2012), severe shortages of the curriculum guides and related educational materials (Bizunesh, 1983) and equitable dissemination and implementation of curricula (Britto et al., 2012).

Classroom practices were also critiqued in different ways. The limited delivery of early childhood education is too often focused on teaching the children formal skills in reading, writing and arithmetic exercises; the traditional practice of allocating most of the time to reading, writing, and arithmetic (the 3Rs) and need to focus on 5 Rs by adding two more Rs (recreation and relationship); meaning including play, games, music, exercises, communication, and interaction (Habtamu, 1996). Teaching methods were not student-centred (Tessema, 2014), focus on chalk and talk type of learning (MoE, 2010) and assessment techniques were summative type (Tessema, 2014). Utilization of positive reinforcement and reward, and handling children with special needs were minimal (Tsehay, 2013), care giver-child interaction was below the expected level (Girma, 2014), poor behavioral management practices that may inflict problem behavior on children (Tirussew, 1998), and negative discipline techniques, exposure to conflict and violence, experiencing the aggression of others, angry social interactions and excessively high expectations for achievement tend to be stressors in schools (Tirussew, 1998).

In terms of resources, it was found that there was lack of a permanent budget (MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C; Dereje, 1994; Habtamu, 1996; Tirussew et al., 2007; Britto et al., 2012; Dinke, 2014), infrastructure (Dereje, 1994; Tirussew, 2007; Britto et al., 2012), resources (Dereje, 1994; Young Lives Ethiopia, 2012), instructional materials, equipment, aids and/play materials (Tirussew, 1979; Bizunesh, 1983; Bizunesh, 1984; Dereje, 1994; Tirussew, 2007; Britto et al., 2012; Dinke, 2014), and children's books (Azeb, 1982; MoE, 2010; Habtamu, 1996). Many KGs are not child friendly physically and location-wise (NCC, 1974a E.C; MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C) as they are originally built for other purposes (mainly residence) (Habtamu, 1996; MoE, 2010). There were inappropriate settings within which most of these centres function (UNESCO-IICBA, 2010), indoor and outdoor environment of ECE centres are not conducive and child sized (Dinke, 2014)), lack of space for play and learning (MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C; MoE, 2010), physical set up not were not conducive (Bizunesh, 1983), space, light and ventilation were inadequate (Bizunesh, 1983), basic health and safety facilities are little or non-existent (Dereje, 1994), toilet rooms lacked sanitary facilities and not child-sized (Tessema, 2014), and no clean and potable water (NCC, 1974a E.C; MoE, 2010). There was large pupil-teacher ratio (NCC, 1974a E.C; Habtamu, 1996; Dereje, 1994).

ECCE quality concerns were also addressed from teacher-related perspectives. Teachers in the KG were dissatisfied with the very low salary (NCC, 1974a E.C.), the differential payments for similar qualifications (Bizunesh, 1983; AAEOU, 1978 E.C; Hailesellasie Kebede, Eleni Shiferaw, and Tsige Gebresellasie, 1979 E.C), many of the trainers were working in the KGs only for employment purposes and didn't have much interest in children and the KGs (cited in Habtamu, 1996), and this unattractive salary led to a high turnover of pre-school teachers, making pre-school teachers/ children ratio high (UNESCO-IICBA, 2010). It was repeatedly indicated that the qualification and adequacy of human power deployed in the area has been found low (Tirussew, 1979; Habtamu, 1996; Dereje, 1994; Tessema, 2014), most of the pre-school teachers are untrained or have very limited training (UNESCO-IICBA, 2010; MoE, 2010; Tirussew et al., 2007; Britto et al., 2012), Hence, a strategy and funding to train a cadre of ECCE teachers, to deploy them across rural and urban areas and to pay them enough to keep them in the system (Young Lives Ethiopia, 2012). Need for well-defined and practical guide be given to KG teachers (Bizunesh, 1983).

KG teacher training was not made in a centralized manner (NCC, 1974a E.C.), training period was inadequate (Bizunesh, 1983; MoLSA & MoE, 1982 E.C) and need to be promoted to a relatively longer period (Dereje, 1994). The training programme needs to be reorganized, well-defined and practical (Bizunesh, 1983; Tirusew et al., 2007). Curricula must be strengthened (Tirussew, 1979; Britto et al., 2012), no or weak supervision of the activities of pre-school TTIs and the procedure for granting licenses could be dysfunctional (UNESCO-IICBA, 2010), pre-school teacher education centres are set up in buildings that are not initially established for the purpose and hence, most of these institutions have no auditorium, appropriate playground, toilet rooms separate for males and females, offices for pre-school teacher educators, and lack appropriate educational materials like books in the area (UNESCO-IICBA, 2010), interim solutions be worked out to scale-up and strengthen current teacher training strategies to reach primary school teachers who are working in Zero-Classes and conduct in-service (Britto et al., 2012), the general perception was that teacher-training institutes cannot meet the need for quality training and achieve low student-teacher ratios in the pre-school classroom setting (Britto et al., 2012).

**Relevance:** considering our culture and tradition as deterrent to development (Demeke, 2007), there has been a complete abandoning of the well flourished Ethio-centric traditional system of education in favor the so-called "modern approach" which was put in place a century ago and detached Ethiopians from their precious legacies and value systems (Demeke, 2007; P.191). According to national surveys, these include content irrelevant curricula, textbooks, aids and materials (UNESCO, 2006; Tirussew et al., 2007). Childhood education and the use of medium of

instruction seem to alienate the children from their culture (Belay, 2007) and expose children to things that are not related to the artifacts of his/her culture (Alasebu, 1981). The social and cultural relevance of curriculum to Ethiopian children is questionable (Tirussew et al., 2007; Demeke, 2007) as most private pre-schools use curriculum borrowed from other countries and none of the elements reflect the Ethiopian culture and tradition (Demeke, 2007); curriculum contents lacked relevance to children's environment particularly in private ECE (Tessema, 2014). There is a need to ensure contextualization of the curricula (culturally and linguistically appropriate, accessible to children with disabilities, and in pastoral communities) guidelines and learning strategies that are being generated at the central level (Britto et al., 2012). The ECCE standard set by the Ministry of Education doesn't reflect the reality and hence none of the pre-schools visited meet the standard set (UNESCO Cluster Office Addis Ababa, 2006, P. 11), use foreign language in such early levels, and consider as an important outcome of pre-school education (MoE, 2010; Tirussew et al., 2007; Demeke, 2007). Although there is an encouraging beginning in the use of local languages, there is lack of trained teachers, teaching materials in these languages (Alem, 2007), stories and picture books would have to reflect the Ethiopian multi-ethnic cultural values, morality etc. (Habtamu, 1996).

**Impacts:** The study commissioned by the World Bank in 2000 (World Bank, 2000) attempted to review the experiences and impact of ECCE programmes run by NGOs and traditional providers (church, public, Quranic sites) in the country by making rapid assessments of the educational performance of children who had access to ECCE service and who had not in the three different grade levels were made. Young Lives Policy Brief compared the subsequent schooling trajectories of urban children who do and do not have access to pre-school, and shows that those who access early education have substantial advantages and hence in rural areas, where pre-school is very rare, children face major difficulties in making a smooth transition into primary school (Young Lives Policy Brief, 2012). Examined the effects ECE attendance on cognitive development of pre-school age children (measured using Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and Cognitive Development Assessment Quantity Test) with particular emphasis on urban part of the country. Results consistently showed that ECE attendance is positively associated with a substantial improvement in children's cognitive development (Tassew, 2011). Although not in comparative terms, others have also indicated the contribution of ECCE for cognitive development (Fantahun, 2013) and social development (Girma, 2014). Assessment of the contribution of pilot ECCEs run by SCN in Amhara, Afar and SNNP were reported to have positive impact in the mid (KES, 2012) and end-term (Fromseas, 2014) evaluations. Children who went through ECE tend to be more successful, show better social adjustment, and have better behavior, fewer drop outs and grade repetition than those who did not go through ECE (Tessema, 2014). The "O" class

recently attached to primary schools plays a significant role for children with low income families to help in development of school readiness and child socialization (Tessema, 2014).

Desta and Azmeraw examined contributions of community-based early childhood development intervention programme (preventive medical monitoring and attention, timely treatments, improved own health, hygiene and nutrition) and found positive impacts: improved health, hygiene and nutrition of children and mothers; parents opted and practiced modern methods to traditional treatments and explicitly depicted the benefit they get from modern treatments; improved feeding practices for their children in terms of quality and pattern (Desta and Azmeraw, 2009). The intervention has also brought about improved parenting skills, increased knowledge of parents on harmful customary practices and promoting children's rights. Children's gains in both social and cognitive aspects have been significant. As rated by teachers and parents, children promoted from ECDE centres to primary schools are assertive, better in social skills, neat and clean, respectful and obedient, better in understanding classroom lessons, and active participants in classroom activities. They are self-assured, able and motivated, fast learners. Their academic and social readiness is better than their non-ECCE classmates. All ECCE group has joined primary school, has better class attendance, better performance, higher pass rates, lower repetition, and dropout rates compared to their non-ECCE peers.

APAP and FEAT discussed the importance of CBOs involvement in the provision of ECCE and assessed the opportunities, challenges and strategies of CBOs and found that issuance of the ECCE national framework and the emphasis it gave to the role of CBOs, interest in the CBOs to engage in the service, existence of relevant technical tools and resources facilitating engagement in ECCE service delivery and existence of various modes of programme implementation that take into account the existing contexts of these local institutions were indicated as opportunities. The limited efforts to popularize the policy and related frameworks at the grassroots level, the current directions by the government which ultimately result in community engagement in the administration and management of ECCE centres are found to be critical. Moreover, institutional competence of CBOs in terms of limited pragmatic experience in the field as well as inability to allocate the required resources to comply with minimum standards are also indicated as the major challenges for CBOs' participation in ECCE service delivery. Extensive engagement in community level ECCE policy awareness, strengthening governance structure at all levels, piloting CBO-managed ECCE centres, and developing the overall institutional competence of CBOs were enlisted as strategies for better CBO involvement.

Demissie identified some lessons from a study that attempted to examine the previously attempted but failed CBOs: Need assessment was not made about the community-based pre-school programme, The community was not aware of the significance of the programme, There were some administrative problems like lack of bottom-top-bottom coordination of activities, inability of different parties to perform their task etc, There was lack of systematic follow up during the implementation of the programme, Community should be encouraged to participate in the evolution and growth of the programme, Needs and interest of the children that will take part in the programme should be assessed, The roles and responsibilities of the community representatives to pre-school affairs should be clearly identified (Demissie, 1996).

Among the Guji people, too, children's access to the formal early childhood education is almost none (Tadesse, 2014). Tradition of early Childhood Care and Education among the Guji involves members of extended family. When they are two years, children are able to walk and follow their siblings. When they are five years old, they start to look after heifers near home and fetch water from a nearby river. When they are seven years old, they start to look after cattle on the nearby pastureland. When they are ten, girls manage household activities; boys start to herd cattle at a distance pastureland. Creative, dramatic, oral plays and games are practiced in the field. Participatory early childhood care and education, everyday life based early childhood care and education provides young children with knowledge about how to express themselves, their needs and their environment.

## **7. REFLECTIONS**

### **7.1 Lessons and Way Forward**

There has been quite a history on early childhood education in Ethiopia; though a European type “modern ECCE” was introduced quite later. The two worked parallel to each other till today but without sharing experiences, and cooperating with one another. Rather, the traditional centres were successively sidelined from the scene and gradually got weakened.

There have been lots of efforts made to expand “modern ECCE” in Ethiopia by different agencies including framing (legal, administrative, and academic), ground rules and programmes, setting out institutional establishments and resources, and enrolling and educating young children. There are today ECCE policy guides, curriculum, and standards. Different research and conferences were also held to promote the ECCE cause. Furthermore, ECCE in Ethiopian is still known to have strong (relevant, feasible) foundation that could have been exploited (the traditional schools), tendency to be guided by compelling research in the design of



policies and strategies, diversity in mode of delivery, urban experiences (academic, admin, resource utilization) that can be customized for rural ECCE etc. There are in fact improvements in access and equity in more recent days; though there is still more effort needed to tap from the opportunities around for further expansion of the ECCE programmes as well as improving relevance and quality. For example, existing so many civil societies engaged in ECCE-related projects, social institutions in the different villages and kebeles (idir, mahiber) that could possible organize themselves towards availing ECCE services for children in their environs, and religious centres (churches, mosques) that could possible provide resources and space for ECCE provisions. Of course, the spaces owned by the various government schools and offices can also be exploited expanding the service.

By way of presenting the major findings as well as implications of these studies, we need to briefly look into other distinctive features, concerns and opportunities of ECCE in Ethiopia with direct and indirect reference to the four commonly cited core issues of ECCE delivery: access, equity, quality, and relevance:

1. Although there are wider recognitions of the importance of ECCE for national, familial, and individual development and advancement, there is still lower government involvement in resource allocation and budgeting.
2. The coverage of ECCE is extremely low. Furthermore, ECCE in Ethiopia is conspicuously noted with strong rural-urban divide. In urban areas, there is a diversity of non-governmental providers. Wealthier parents tend to use private pre-schools, while some poorer parents use the limited faith-based facilities. In rural areas, only few non-governmental organizations provide pre-school services.
3. Recent years have noted improvements in ECCE access mainly because of introduction of two additional modalities of ECCE (child-to child initiatives and primary school attached) classes). These modalities are kinds of one year school readiness programmes to prepare children. Traditionally, this school readiness programmes were carried out through priest and quaranic schools; which have been dwindling in the last couple decades and now becoming almost quite peripheral.
4. Although the introduction of the two school readiness programmes has enabled many children to somehow access education, coverage and quality of rural ECCE provision is still low because government primary school systems are still being consolidated and lack the resources to offer the recommended) classes (Young Lives Policy Brief, 2012). These two programmes were introduced without their own financial budget from the government. They just share the existing not only already insufficient resources but are in some cases less relevant and inappropriate for pre-schoolers; as in deploying primary school teachers for pre-schoolers in O classes.

5. The major concern of ECCE in Ethiopia has been the problem of programme relevance and cultural sensitivity. Goals and objectives, language, curriculum, teaching approaches, materials and aids were less reflective of the socio-cultural and environmental scenario that surrounds the ECCE establishments. This in a way means developing the children out of the context. This is not against their rights to learn and develop their cultural identity but also counterproductive in promoting intellectual development of the children.
6. ECCE as a programme and approach is holistic. It is not only about education as it has been the case in Ethiopia. There is an important and big element missing; the care aspect. If care is missing, then there is no guarantee that the programme is any different from primary school. Critiques hold it that there is a tendency of schooling pre-schools by emphasizing domains of development that are basically academic/cognitive focused. Language (speaking, reading and writing) and arithmetic skills remain to dominate many pre-school establishments. Lecturing is prematurely introduced and this tends to discourage development of children's personal algorithms, creativity, and curiosity.
7. Lack of collaboration among the three line ministries (i.e. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs); the partnership becoming division of labor rather than a joint enterprise
8. Lack of professionalism as in, for example, use of untrained human power as facilitators, administrators, and supervisors are still common.

In the light of the above concerns, it is recommended that there is a critical need to look into more affordable, accessible, culturally sensitive and yet quality programmes in addition to revisiting the existing regular pre-schools, strengthening the two school readiness (child-to-child initiatives and O- classes) programmes, and revitalizing the traditional (priest and quranic) schools. In this connection, establishing partnership among stakeholders would help in many ways. For example, using grandparents as co-facilitators as in storytelling; experience sharing between traditional and modern ECCE establishments; a blended rather than independent use of child-to-child and O-class initiatives; GO, NGO, FO, and CBO partnership in initiating innovative ECCE programmes for rural and low income families; building school-parent partnership as an entry point for parent education, and cooperation and integration in the activities of the three line ministries involved in the conduct of ECCE. Furthermore, professionalizing ECCE through training personnel (facilitators, administrators, and supervisors); revisiting programmes, methods and resources; incorporating care into the educational practice; balancing the ECCE goals of personal development of the children and their preparation for elementary school; tracking of and recording children's growth; supervision and monitoring of the ECCE establishments to empowering and supporting them rather than to penalizing for deficiencies are other areas of improvement in the time ahead.

Addressing these and related concerns requires conducting extensive ECCE research in the future. In fact, there has already been lots of ECCE research, many of them being repetitive, suggesting unwise expenditure of resources. There is lack of information exchange mechanism among ECCE researchers and, hence, nobody knows who does what. In the absence of this knowledge, every researcher seems to feel that the ground is nil and this would compel him/ her initiate a research agenda to address perceived gaps.

Despite abundance, existing body of research in ECCE were again characteristically limited in many ways and, hence, there is a need for further engagements in so many dimensions of ECCE. To begin with, previous research has focused almost on lacks, deficits, problems, challenges etc. Strengths and opportunities particularly found in the communities have not been explored to assist in the design of cost-effective community friendly ECCE in Ethiopia. The investigations so far has also been very broad survey type assessments that provide little assistance in designing developmentally and culturally appropriate programmes, resources, and services. Hence, there is little information about the very developmental profile of the targeted children and, as a result, ECCE planning and conduct have been without due regard to children's actual as well as proximal zone of development. There has still been little, if any, information about the role of the various ECCE programmes/modalities in creating children's level of school readiness. Indicators and measures of context-based school readiness still need to be worked out through extensive research in ECCE in Ethiopia.

There are widespread organizational differences between early childhood and primary school, and associated differences in culture and philosophy. Hence, there is a need to explore the extent of continuities and coordination mainly in curricular, pedagogical, linguistic, and professional practices. Other gaps that are needed to be addressed in future research to assist in expanding quality, relevant, and cost-effective ECCE include viability of early childhood education delivery through traditional centres, early childhood care and education strategies for rural children, civic society engagements in the provision of early childhood care and education in Ethiopia, and indigenization of early childhood care and education in Ethiopia.

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