

Practices and Challenges of Preschool Program Implementation in Southern Nations', Nationalities' and People's Region, Ethiopia: Curriculum and Teacher related Factors

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices and challenges of Preschool implementation in Southern, Nations', Nationalities' and People's Region. Accordingly, the study aimed in answering the following research questions; namely, the relevance of the curriculum; competency and qualification of preschool teachers in the effective implementation of the program. The study employed descriptive survey research design and methodology and gathered information from primary and secondary sources using qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection. At ultimate stage, 57 preschools were selected from sampled zones using multi-stage cluster sampling. Accordingly, 117 preschool teachers and 57 principals were selected as elementary units of sampling. In addition, concerned officials and experts from different education officials were included from targeted areas purposively. The study used in-depth interviews, questionnaire, FGD, and field observation to collect data from respondents and analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The result of the study strongly indicated that relevance of curriculum, existence and qualification of preschool teachers were poor. The study concluded that the problem of above mentioned factors contributed to low success of program implementation. As recommendation, the concerned stakeholders (REB, ZEDs, Woreda WEO, Schools, Communities, NGOS etc.) should work hard in collaboration and integration for the success of the program implementation.

Keywords: Cluster, Child-to-Child Program, ECCE, Facilitator, Preschool, "O" Class

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I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is among the most contributing factors to bring the desired well-founded experience and healthy personality. It is quite important for child's holistic development, particularly in mental, social, language and personal developments. Research pointed out that the advantages of high-quality preschool program include improved school readiness; reduced grade retention; reduced need for costly remedial and special education services; and improved educational test scores and promote long-term educational success (Clark and Waller, 2007) [1]. As noted by OECD (2006) [1], "the kindergarten years are seen as a broad preparation for life and the foundation stage of lifelong learning."

Alongside, having positive impact on the development of a child, early childhood education also has significant socio-economic benefits. It enhances women's labor market participation and gives them equal opportunity of economic contribution (OECD, 2006) [1]. Above all, expanding early childhood education goes beyond benefiting children. It is the question of building nation with having well educated and treated quality citizens. A long-term productivity of any plant depends on the nature of intervention taken in early period. The same is true for human beings. "The best investment we can make is in early childhood as what happens to us in the first six years basically set our coping skills and competence for life" (quoted by Dolya (2010:10) from J. Fraser Mustard, 1997) [1].

Education is not optional requirement for early childhood children; rather it is a fundamental right that they are entitled with. The 1990's World Summit on "Education for All" states that regardless of any condition, every person has the right to education. From the six goals aimed at providing education for every citizen, the first goal states that "expanding and improving early childhood care and education." The summit stressed that governments, NGOs and development agencies have the responsibility to implement the goal. The 2000 Dakar Summit also affirms this. While the Dakar declaration on "Education for ALL" has ended in 2015, the intended goal of achieving "Education for all" is not met yet.

Hence, this issue is still the pressing one around the World. Cognizant of this fact, the fourth goal of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focuses on “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities” especially Article 2 says, “By 2030 ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and Preschool education so that they are ready for primary education” (UN, 2015) [5]. Based on this goal, the sixth Article of the World Education Forum held in Incheon, South Korea entitled “towards inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All” states that “... We ... encourage the provision of at least one year of free and compulsory quality Preschool education and that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care and education” (UNESCO et al., 2015) [5]. This indicates that there is the need to expand the access of preschool education for all children.

As a result of wide range of its importance in one hand and the increasing concern for child right on the other, the attention given to make early childhood education accessible for all children is dramatically increased across the globe. In most countries, it is now viewed as the base of all kinds of developments. And it is largely seen as one of the key areas of investment. The program which once was left for private owners, now nations are largely taking part in its accessibility and quality of delivery and in financial support. Particularly, in member states of Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) – which incorporated 30 States from developed nations (OECD, 2006) [1]– expanding and enhancing the practices of early childhood education and care is seen as primary role of the governments.

In most African countries, education got momentum only after independence from colonialism (Ansell, 2005; Kamerman, 2006) [5]. But, the attention given for Preschools was unsatisfactory until the beginning of 21st century. The average gross enrollment ratio of the continent in 2004 was 12%. Only 5 countries registered above 50%. The rate increased to 17% in 2008 (UNESCO, 2010) [2]. Due to pressing wide ranges of challenges Africa had been facing in the continent, the goal of achieving early childhood education for all by 2015 became unrealistic.

“Access, equity, and inclusion. ECCE programs in Sub-Saharan Africa are highly inequitable on all accounts.... Programs are not inclusive at all.... Only two in five children have access to ECCE programs due to a lack of schools. The blocking factors are often socio-cultural, political, institutional, and technical capacity” (UNESCO, 2010:11).

Until 2010, no country in Sub-Saharan Africa adopted preschool education policy as UNESCO noted. The region is failed in provide adequate and qualified teachers, existing schools are poorly furnished, the curricula lack adequacy in addressing the context, and there is no appropriate assessment system.

Ethiopia is among African countries in which the accessibility and equity was low until the last five years. Even if country adopted New Education and Training Policy two decades ago, the attention given for preschool by the government had been almost null for about two decades. Nor the attention given for the training of quality pre-school teachers was satisfactory except that increasing the duration from 6 month, which was set in 1971 to one year. Studies revealed that the accessibility preschool education was only about 4% in rural six years ago (Woodhead, 2009) [1]. While the government had been expanding primary education dramatically, the provision of early childhood education was almost neglected. Private sectors and religious organization were the sole actors, particularly it has left preschool education only to communities, NGOs and private sector. Since education requires huge investment and the aim of private sector in expanding education is profit maximization, it focused only in urban areas where parents relatively afford to pay for their children’s education. Therefore, currently, there is uneven distribution and quality of preschool education between urban and rural areas. Cognizant of this fact, starting from 2008, the government designed a strategy to expand preschool education in the country. Accordingly, the “O” class, child-to-child programs, and community and religious organization owned centers were introduced (MoE, 2016) [2], particularly since 2011. The launching of “O” class in government primary schools and community and religious centers has been uplifted the gross enrolment rate from the level of below 10 to 39 as of 2014/2015. The government also committed to the extent of preparing policy framework, strategy, guidelines and standards. The policy has classified ECCE in to two parts: prenatal to 3+ years and 4-7 years. The former emphasizes health, stimulation and care in which parents’ role is paramount for the success of this. Ministry of health is given primary mandate to teach parents and community through its Kebele based health extensions. The latter, on the other hand, is named as preschool education in which children are expected to attend schools for at least 4 hours (8:00AM-12PM) a day. Ministry of Education is given prime responsibility in implementing the policy.

As one of the regions of the country, Southern Nation Nationalities Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) also has been implementing preschool education in its different forms such as “O” Class in formal primary schools, community and religious organization owned preschools and Child-to-Child and private kindergartens.

Even if, the Regional Education Bureau included the preschool program in its 2nd Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) as a priority area to maximize the access and quality of education, there is no empirical evidence about the level of implementation, and how the mentioned hindering factors are mitigated.

Good practices that should be scaled up and problems hindering the performance of the program were not well identified. Therefore, this research deals with assessing the implementation practices and challenges of preschool programs in SNNPRS, Ethiopia with special focus on curriculum and teacher related factors.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Education sector is the area in which Ethiopia has been registered remarkable achievement in the last two decades. The Ethiopian government gave due attention in expanding access to education for all levels of the education system. To attain the targets set by 1990 and 2000 World Summit in Education For All and the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and the subsequent education 2030 Incheon Declaration and the Framework for Action (UNESCO, et.al., 2015), the country took strong and noticeable measures. Hence, the accessibility of primary education has been realized in most parts of the country. For instance, the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) and Net Enrolment Rate (NER) of primary Education of the country reached 102.7% and 94.3% respectively. In Addition, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for primary education at national level was 0.92 and it is 0.90 for SNNPRS. When we see SNNPRS separately, the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) and Net Enrolment Rate (NER) of Primary education was 108.4% and 101.1% respectively (MoE, 2016). This indicates that the country has registered massive achievement specially in creating access to education for all children of primary schools and maintaining equity at this level. Although, the country's average GER was above the Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) average in expanding preschool program, it is still lagging behind some African countries such as Ghana (115.1%), South Africa (76.17%) and Kenya (73.79%). It is also behind the world average GER. While the SSA average was 21.87% it was 44.04% at World level (World Bank Group, 2016). In this regard, as Educational Statistics Annual Abstract of 2013/2014 shows the GER for Preschool education in the country was only 34.0% at national level and 46.6% at SNNPRS level (MoE, 2016). As (MoE, 2016) report, the National and Regional GER reached 39.0% and 57.0% respectively. In addition, the National and Regional NER reached 37.0% and 54.0% respectively.

It is clear that the National Policy Framework and various research evidences has suggested the critical importance of pre-school education program for the future harmonious development of the children in particular and their social, cultural and economic development in general (Girma Lemma, 2014) [5].

In addition to this, the National Policy Framework considers ECCE program as an intervention strategy to curb the problem of child labor and also as an indispensable means to enhance enrolment in primary schools on equal grounds; increased productivity; cost savings for both the families and the nation; poverty reduction; minimized gender disparity; increased opportunities for parental and community mobilization and empowerment and protect the rights of children (Ethiopian ECCE Policy Framework, 2010) [2]. However, Pre-school education program is still limited to date to meet the demands of the growing numbers of preschool age children.

In light of the above dispute with the growing demand of preschool program the sector in terms of recognizing the contribution of ECCE for later development of children, it necessitates the researcher to undertake the research to explore the curriculum and teacher related factors affecting the implementation Practices of preschool education program in SNNPR.

In 2004 the GER of Preschool was 2% - the lowest compared to other African countries. The figure increased to 2.3% in 2006 (MoE, 2006) [2], and 5.4% in 2010/2011 (MoE, 2016). Nevertheless, due to high quality concern in primary school, on one hand, and the need to implement the educational rights of children set in the World Summits on the other, there has been growing concern to expand Preschool education across the country in the last five years. Particularly, the research results unveiled recently on school performance of grade 2 and grade 3 school children across the country by USAID forced the country to think differently and take immediate action to address the problem. The result of the research was quite frustrating. The problem was more magnificent in SNNPR (USAID, 2010). Lack of preschool education has been seen as the major contributing factor. Since then, "O" classes had been opened in primary schools and in other social gatherings (MoE, 2016); and preschool teachers training program was launched at diploma level in CTEs. As a result, the enrolment is relatively increased. In SNNPR, the GER was increased from 3.9 in 2006/2007 to 47.7% in 2015 (SNNPREB, 2015) [5]. In contrary to this, according to data obtained from MoE Annual Abstract (2006/07) the GER of SNNPR was 3.0 and increased to 57.0% in 2015. Even though, there was a discrepancy between the national and regional data, both data indicates that there is a progress in the enrolment of preschool children in the region. However, there is high concern with regard to its provision of access to, maintaining equity and ensuring quality of education for all children in the region. In spite of its relative expansion, there are almost 50% of preschool children who are still left behind educational opportunity in the region. There are several factors that could affect the effective implementation of the program. Among these the relevance and appropriateness of the curriculum and the quantity and quality of teachers are the factors that may affect the proper implementation and effectiveness of the program. In this regard, the following basic research questions were raised in relation to the practices and challenges of preschool education under the topic that follow.

- To what extent does the curriculum of preschool education is relevant and appropriate to preschool students?
- What is the level of competence and qualification of preschool teachers in the region?
- What are the challenges for the effective implementation of the program?

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this research was to investigate the curriculum and teacher related factors affecting the implementation of preschool education program in SNNPR.

3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the research were:

- To assess the relevance and appropriateness of the curriculum in terms of content and methods of delivery
- To assess the extent of competency and qualification of preschool teachers in the region
- To correlate the competency with qualification of teachers
- To assess the challenges for effective implementation of the Program

IV. SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

4.1 Significance of the study

Assessing the the curriculum and teacher related factors affecting the implementation of preschool education program is very important part of education process to obtain evidences for improving the challenges. So, understanding this, the study has the following significance.

- It may provide information to education officials and concerned bodies on the level of implementation of preschool program in the region;
- It may provide information and policy directions to planners, policy and decision makers and curriculum developers at national and regional level of the education system;
- It may provide relevant information on the improvement of preschool program for local level planners and practitioners;
- It may help education sectors to take remedial measures by identifying the curriculum and teacher related factors hindering the effective implementation of the program in the region.
- It may help as the base for further studies on preschool program.

4.2 Scope of the Study

Geographically the study was conducted in four zones (Sidama, Gurage, Wolaita, and Bench Maji), one city administration-Hawassa City and one special Woreda (Halaba) of South Nations, Nationalities and People Regional states of Ethiopia and conceptually the study focuses on in SNNPR. Although there are several factors that affect the effective implementation of preschool programs, this research is delimited only to curriculum and teachers related factors.

V. TECHNICAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

The main focus of this research is to assess how the preschool education is being implemented and sorting out the curriculum and teachers related challenges hindering its implementation. For the purpose of this study, descriptive research was used to obtain a picture of implementation of the preschool program in the region through gathering data that labels the practices and then organizes, tabulates, depicts and describes the obtained data. Survey methodology was used to collect relevant data to answer the basic questions because it is useful for non-experimental descriptive designs that seek to describe reality like information on attitudes and behaviors (Mathers N. etl, 2007). In support of this idea Isaac & Michael, in Glasow (2005:1) [3] stated that:

Survey research is used to answer questions that have been raised, to solve problems that have been posed or observed, to assess needs and set goals, to determine whether or not specific objectives have been met, to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made, to analyze trend across time, and generally, to describe what exists, in what amount, and in what context (Isaac & Michael, in Glasow, 2005).

In this regard, the survey method was applied in this research to determine whether the set objectives of preschool education program have been met or not, to analyze trend of preschool implementation across time, to describe the status and extent of the program implementation, to establish baseline information on the program implementation in the region. In the survey, both the qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches were employed.

5.2 Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized to obtain information about the subject under the study. The primary data were collected from people who were involved in implementing and running the program at regional, Zonal, Wereda and school levels; first line administrators (directors and supervisors), preschool teachers and their assistants; parents of preschool children, the local community of preschool education at school level and preschool students. In addition to this, secondary data were collected from Annual Education Abstracts, reports, strategies, different research results and national and regional Preschool Education Frameworks on practices of preschool education.

5.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

This research was carried out across the region of SNNPRS. In order to select the research participants, multistage cluster sampling, purposive sampling and simple random sampling were used.

The study used cluster sampling because samples would be taken from different geographical location (location wise study) and sampling unit may be made at different levels of selection such as units of zones, woreda, Kebele and school. In addition, the researcher assumed that there may not be up-to-dated list of preschool centers to use other methods of sampling. Moreover, from pilot survey, it was checked that there was extreme heterogeneous nature of response variable (implementation of preschool program and readiness of preschool students) especially between urban and rural preschools. The further point is that, there was considerable heterogeneity of the implementation of preschool program from zones to zones, woredas to woredas and preschools to preschools. Therefore, the study used cluster sampling at each stage and proportionate cluster sampling to make the size of elements to be included in the sample proportional to its size.

Accordingly, out of 14 Zones (Sidama, Gedeo, Silte, Guraghe, Hadia, Kembata Tembaro, Wolayta, Gamogofa, Segen, Debub Omo, Dawro, Kafa, Bench Maji and Sheka) of the region, 4 Zones (Sidama, Wolayta, Guraghe and Bench Maji) were selected using cluster sampling. In addition, among 4 special woredas (Basketo, Halaba, Konta and Yem), Halaba Special Woreda was selected by using simple random sampling method. Moreover, Hawassa City Administration was selected purposively to represent the urban setting. To select representative woredas from each zones, special woreda and Hawassa City administration, cluster proportionate sampling method was employed. In this regard out of 76 woredas, 16 were selected for the study. Accordingly, 5 woredas from Sidama, 3 from Guraghe, 3 from Wolayta, 2 from Bench Maji, 1 from Halaba and 2 sub-cities from Hawassa City Administration were selected.

Then, out of 405 schools available in selected woredas and sub-cities, 56 were selected using cluster proportionate sampling (27 schools from Sidama Zone, 12 schools from Guraghe, 10 schools from Wolayta, 5 schools from Bench Maji; 1 school from Halaba and 2 schools from Hawassa). The targeted schools were identified by using cluster proportionate sampling method.

Therefore, the participants of the research were 117 (56 teachers from Sidama, 33 teachers from Guraghe, 18 teachers from Wolayta, 7 teachers from Bench Maji, 1 teacher from Halaba and 2 teachers from Hawassa City Administration) preschool teachers. Assistant teachers of each school were selected by using availability sampling; 5 Preschools children from each school were selected by using simple random sampling; 57 directors (1 from each schools) were selected by using purposive sampling; from the region, education bureau head, Teaching-learning and Assessment Core Process Owners and Preschool Experts; from zone levels, Zone Education Head, Teaching-learning and Assessment Core Process Owners and Preschool experts; and from woreda, Woreda Education Head, Teaching-learning and Assessment Core Process Owners and Preschool experts were included from targeted areas purposively. In general, the samples that would be selected at last stage were:

- 117 preschool teachers and 57 principals for questionnaire
- 16 preschool experts of woreda from education offices, 4 preschool experts of zonal education departments, 2 preschool experts from Hawassa City Administration Education Department, 2 preschool experts from Halaba Education Office, and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Core Process Owner and Preschool Program Expert from SNNPR Education Bureau for interview
- Photographs to assure the reality of the results

In addition, observation with check lists and field notes was used by the researcher at each center in order to supplement the results obtained by analysis of data which were obtained from the above mentioned samples.

5.4 Data Collection Tools

The types of data used for the study were both quantitative and qualitative. Accordingly, the instruments, which were used, for data gathering include in-depth interview, questionnaire, focus group discussion, field observation using checklist, and data from documents.

Questionnaire with close-ended questions and few open-ended questions was employed to collect data from school directors, preschool teachers, and assistant teachers. The questionnaire was developed based on the

existing relevant review of literatures, knowledge and experience of the researchers. Furthermore, the questionnaire was translated from English to Amharic before it was administered to principals, teachers and assistant teachers. The questionnaire was subjected to comments from different professionals in the area of education and language before dispatching.

In-depth interview was employed to gather data from region, zone and woreda level education sector head, teaching learning and assessment core process owner and preschool experts. The interview was conducted based on the role of each of the participants in relation to implementing preschool program. In addition, focus group discussion was used to gather data from parents.

Observation was another very important tool that was employed in the data gathering process. It had two types, namely field note (recording any events as they happened) and field observation checklist. This observation technique gathered whether a teacher delivers the contents of the curriculum in the way it has to be for preschool children; teacher's love and care for children inside and outside classroom; availability and use of instructional materials in the class; and teacher's classroom management. The data from documentary sources such as relevance of curriculum in content, method, context, material and assessment used were collected by reviewing the secondary data sources.

5.5 Methods of Data Analysis

In analyzing the data of the study, both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis methods were used. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used for quantitative data analysis to determine frequency, percentages, mean, standard deviation, correlation and other inferential results. In addition; qualitative data obtained through interview from preschool focal persons of selected woredas and zones and focus group discussion responses were organized in to selected themes and then analyzed qualitatively and triangulated with quantitative results.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, diagrams, pie-charts and graphs were employed to describe the general characteristics of the data.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Background Information of the Respondents

Table 6.1 below shows the back ground information of the teacher and principal respondents from rural and urban settings. In addition to this, it also indicates the distribution of respondents on their respective zones, special woreda, city administration and woreda.

TABLE 6. 1: Back ground Information of respondents'

Characteristics of the respondents'		Teachers' response in %	Principals' response in %
Residence of preschool teachers	Urban	20.8	27.39
	Rural	79.2	72.61
Zone/City/Special Woreda of respondents	Hawassa	9.2	8.7
	Sidama	36.1	32.6
	Halaba	8.2	6.5
	Wolaita	18.6	14.9
	Guraghe	19.8	28.4
	Bench Maji	10.1	8.9

Source: Primary data, 2016.

As it can be seen from Table 6.1, majority of both teachers and principals were from rural preschools i.e. 79.2% of teachers and 72.61% of principals were from rural preschools and the rest 20.8% of teachers and 27.39% of principals were from rural preschools.

6.2 Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Respondents

The following table indicates that the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics such as sex, education level, marital status and employment base of the teacher and principal respondents.

TABLE 6. 2: Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics of respondents	Teachers' response in %	Principals' response in %
Sex of preschool teachers	Male	50.7
	Female	49.3
Education level of preschool teachers	twelve complete	3.9
	tenth complete	46.9
	Certificate	41.1
	Diploma	8
	degree and above	0
Marital status preschool teachers	Married	42.0
	Single	57.5
	Divorced	5.0
	Widowed	0
Employment base of preschool teachers	Contract	74.8
	Permanent	9.2
	Others	16.0

Source: Primary data, 2016.

The results shown in Table 6.2 above indicates that among 117 teacher respondents, 50.7% were male and 49.3% were female; while 88.4% of principal respondents were males and 11.6% were females. With regard to the qualification of the respondents, 4.7% of principals had only certificate, 58.1% had diploma and 37.2% had degree. While 50.8% of teachers were tenth and twelve grade complete, 41.1% were certificate holders and 8.2% were diploma graduates. Among the teacher respondents, it is possible to see that 42.0% of respondents were married; 57% were single and 0.5% were divorced; whereas in the case of principals, 81.4% were married, 14.0% were single, 2.3% were divorced and 2.3% were widowed. As the results depicted in the above Table, the employment base of preschool teachers was striking; i.e. from the total of preschool teachers, 74.8% were employed in contract base; 9.2% were employed in permanent base and 16% were employed in other bases. Other base employment in this study refers to employment without contract, providing free service to community and the like.

6.3 Descriptive Characteristics of Some Continuous Variables of Respondents

The following Table demonstrates descriptive characteristics of age, experience of teachers in teaching and monthly salary of teacher respondents.

TABLE 6. 3: Descriptive Results on some Continuous Variables

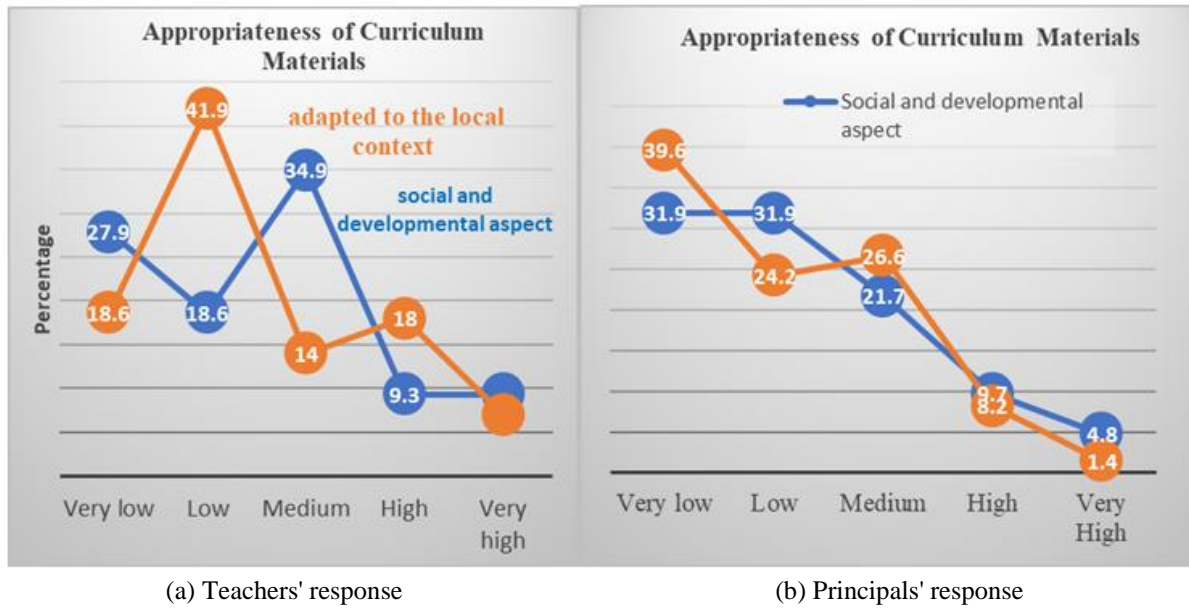
Characteristics of respondents	Response from teachers		
	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness
Age of respondents	23.52	4.09	1.90
Experience in teaching preschool	2.72	2.052	2.208
Monthly salary of preschool teachers	311.79	139.56	3.314

Source: Primary data, 2016.

As it can be seen from Table 6.3 above, the average age of preschool teachers' respondents was 23.52 year with standard deviation of 4.09 year. Regarding the experience of teaching, preschool teachers had an average teaching experience of 2.72 year with standard deviation of 2.05 year indicating that there is moderate difference in the number of the service years among preschool teachers. As far as the monthly salary of preschool teachers is concerned, their mean monthly salary was 311.79 Birr with standard deviation of 139.56 Birr showing that there is no much difference among the monthly salary of the preschool teachers. However, the average monthly salary of preschool teachers is about half of the minimum wage of the country i.e. 600 Birr. Moreover, as can be seen from Table 6.3 above, only 9.2% of the total preschool teachers were employed in permanent base.

6.4 Appropriateness of the Curriculum

The appropriateness of the curriculum has positive impact for the success of the preschool program. The following figure reveals the level of appropriateness of curriculum material in considering the local context in production of teaching material, and social and developmental aspects of the children.



Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure 6. 1: Appropriateness of the Curriculum Materials

Majority of teacher and principal respondents replied that appropriateness of the curriculum in considering the local context in production of teaching materials, and considering social and developmental aspects of the children was below the average. Accordingly, 63.8% and 67.8% of teachers reported that the appropriateness of the curriculum in considering the local context in the production of the teaching materials, and social and developmental aspects of the children was below the average respectively. Whereas, 73.4% and 61.5% of principals reported that the appropriateness of curriculum in considering the local context in the production of the teaching material, and social and developmental aspects of the children was below the average respectively. Hence, from both cases, we can conclude that the appropriateness of the curriculum in considering the local context of the production of materials, and social and developmental aspects of the children was one of the major problems for the effective implementation of the preschool program.

In addition to this, the research team tried to review the available preschool curriculum materials with respect to content, context, method, material and assessment mechanisms.

According to the researchers' observation, there was striking problem on the usage of the curriculum material for the teaching-learning process. Almost in all schools the team observed, none of the teachers use the preschool curriculum material for teaching purpose. Instead, they use grade one text books.

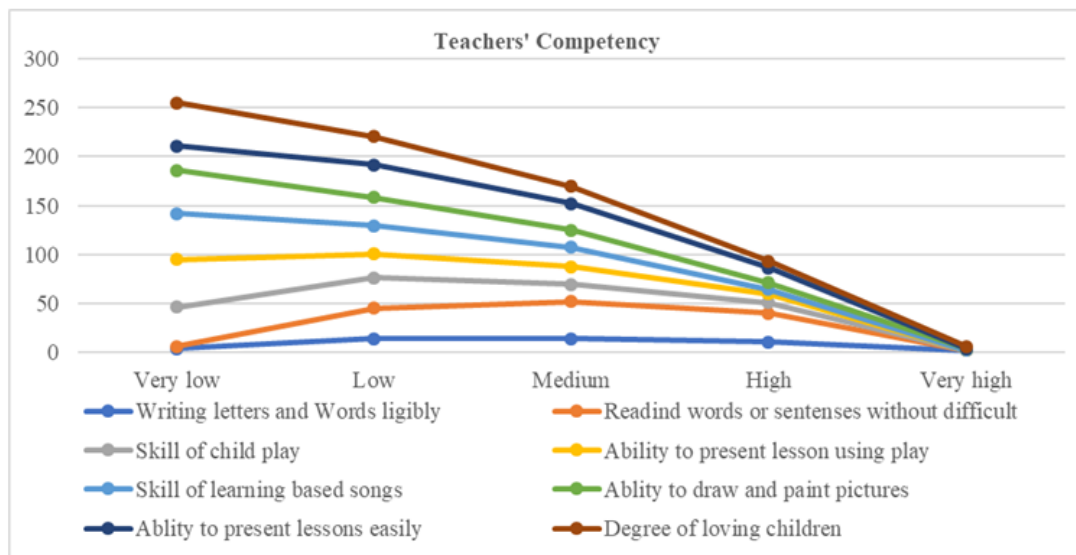
The researchers tried to scrutinize the problem under consideration. The preschool textbook was prepared based on the syllabus. The contents were designed in such a way that the learners know parts of human bodies and their function; understand the environment; learn language such as letters, words and sentence construction; count numbers up to 20 and learn addition and subtraction up to 20; and learn about geometry such as lines, triangle, rectangle, circle, etc. The contents were the same for all age levels of preschool children except the depth. The major problem was not the content, rather how the contents were presented in the book. It was hardly possible to say that it is a textbook because it was full of guideline for a teacher on what to teach and how to teach. It is too broad and bulky. No picture was included in the text at all which does not coincide with the principles of preschool education because, children learn best when things are presented in concrete (observable and tangible) and attractive way. None of these are presented in the text. Therefore, it is rather possible to say that it is a guide for a teacher than a text.

The other problem we noticed was teaching the same content for different age level. As set by the standards of MoE, the age level of children attending preschool were mainly from 4-6 years (MoE, 2010). But in most schools, they were learning together in the same classroom. This forced children to be treated in the same way and learning the same thing each year regardless of their age indicating that the content might be beyond their age level for 4 years old children and it might be boring for 6 years old children if they attend the contents appropriate to 4 year children.

6.5 Competency, Instructional Delivery Method and Other Teacher Related Factors

6.5.1 Competency of Preschool Teachers

It is believed that competency of preschool teachers is one of the most decisive factors in improving students' learning and effective implementation of preschool program. In this study, the research team collected data on competency factors of the preschool teachers (writing letters and words legibly; skill of guiding child play; skill of teaching based on songs; ability to present lessons easily; ability to present lessons properly, reading words or sentences without difficulty; ability of presenting lesson using play; ability to draw and paint pictures and degree of loving children) by observing while the preschool teachers were teaching the students in the classroom.



Source: primary data, 2016

Figure 6. 2: Competency of preschool teachers

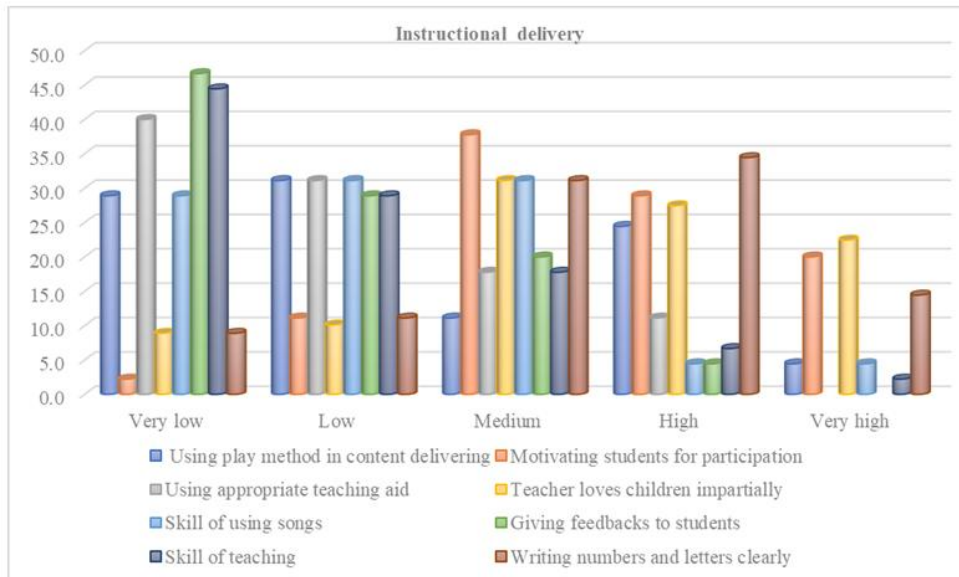
Fig. 6.2 above representing the competency of preschool teachers indicated that with exception of two factors (writing letters and words legibly, and reading words and sentences clearly), the competency of preschool teachers was at low level. However, in writing letters and words legibly, and reading words and sentences clearly, most respondents replied that the knowledge and skills standard of the preschool teachers was at moderate level.

The researchers also observed some preschool teachers in selected centers while they were teaching using checklist. As the observation result indicated, the teachers lack competency in all factors mentioned above indicating that the low competency of the teachers is one of the factor that affect the achievement of the preschool children and effectiveness of the program.

6.5.2 Instructional Delivery Method of Preschool Teachers

One of the methods to evaluate whether teaching learning progress is being conducted properly and whether the students are getting the appropriate education to their age and grade level through appropriate teaching learning process is to observe and investigate how the instruction is delivered in the classroom.

The researchers believed that the best method to collect data on how teachers deliver the knowledge and skill to student is to use observation method of data collection using checklist. In order to do this, the research team filled observation checklist by observing while preschool teachers were teaching. The results obtained from the analysis of data from observation checklist was presented in the following multiple bar diagram.



Source: Primary data, 2016

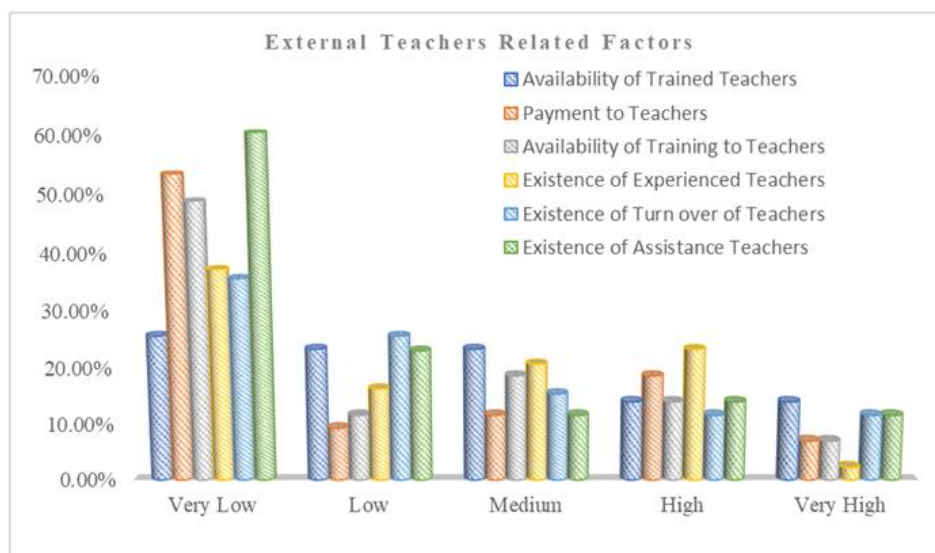
Figure 6. 3: Instructional Delivery

The result revealed that preschool teachers did not have a major problem in motivating students to participate; loving students impartially and writing numbers and letters clearly. However, the result of all other factors (using play method of teaching; using appropriate teaching aid; skill of using songs for teaching and giving feedbacks to students) shows that these were the areas where preschool teachers had major deficiencies. This result strongly indicated that preschool teachers were not competent enough in instructional delivery in the study area.

6.5.3 Teachers Related Factors

6.5.3.1 External Teacher Related Factors

External factors related to preschool teachers are assumed to affect positively or negatively the effective implementation of preschool program. The following multiple bar diagram represents the existence and nature of external teachers related factors (availability of trained teachers, payment to teachers, availability of training to teachers, availability of experienced teachers, turnover of teachers and existence of assistant teachers). These are external teachers related factors that are expected to affect the effective implementation of the program.



Source: Primary data, 2016

Figure 6. 4: External Teachers related factors

It is possible to see from the above multiple diagram that the majority of respondents reported that the nature and availability of these factors was very low and low for all factors. Specially, low level of payment to teachers, absence of training to teachers and almost non-existence of assistant teachers were the main external teachers' related factors that affect the effective implementation of the program and academic achievements of preschool students.

As the results of field observation, focus group discussion and interviews indicated, shortage of experienced teachers, low level of payment to teachers, absence of training to teachers and almost non-existence of assistant teachers were some of major the external teacher related factors responsible for low educational attainment and success of preschool children.

6.5.3.2 Internal Teacher Related Factors

Internal teacher related factors such as professional ethics of teachers, method of teaching used by preschool teachers, commitment and using continuous assessment of teachers etc. are key factors in determining the achievement and readiness of preschool children for primary school. Table 6.4 shows the status of preschool teachers with respect to these factors.

TABLE 6. 4: Internal Teachers related factors

SN	Teachers related factors	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
1	Professional ethics of teachers	2.3%	4.7%	16.3%	37.2%	39.5%
2	Method of teaching used by preschool teachers	30.2%	25.6%	18.6%	18.6%	7%
3	Commitments of teachers	10.6%	20.9%	27.9%	20.9%	19.6%
4	Using continuous assessment	10%	24.6%	26.6%	25.6%	13.2%
5	Late coming of teachers	7%	11.6%	16.3%	37.2%	27.9%
6	Using corporal punishment	2.3%	4.7%	14%	25.6%	53.5%

Source: Primary data, 2016

The above Table 6.4 demonstrates the nature and availability of internal teacher related factors that affect the implementation of the program. Regarding methods of teaching preschool teachers used, 30.2% and 25.6% of principal respondents explained that method of teaching used by preschool teachers was at very low and low level respectively; i.e. preschool teachers use some traditional methods other than play methods of teaching to preschool students. In addition to this 37.2% and 27.9% of school principals replied that the extent of experiencing the habit of late coming by preschool teachers was high and very high respectively. Moreover, 25.6% and 53.5% of principal respondents replied that the extent of using corporal punishment in the classroom and school compound by preschool teachers was high and very high respectively.

In contrary to the above-mentioned responses, 37.2% and 39.5% of principal respondents reported that the nature of the professional ethics of preschool teachers was at high and very high level respectively. However, as the interview and field observation results indicated, most of the preschool teachers were para-professionals and their professional ethics was not promising. For instance, most of them lack formal and short-term training; they come to school late; there was high level of absenteeism etc. As far as the commitment of teachers to teach and using continuous assessment as the main method of students' assessment concerned, the nature of preschool teachers was above the medium level.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

The results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis from both teachers and principal respondents made us to conclude that the appropriateness and relevance of curriculum considering the local context of the material, and social and developmental aspects is at low level. Hence, the problem of curriculum in considering local context of the material, and social and developmental aspects of preschool children is one of the major problem for the practices of effective implementation of the preschool program. In addition, from the observation of the research team, the study concluded that there was striking problem on the usage of the curriculum material for the teaching-learning process. Moreover, in all preschools the team observed, none of the teachers use the curriculum material for teaching purpose.

From the results of the study, one can strongly conclude that, the serious shortage of trained and experienced preschool teachers, low remuneration paid to preschool teachers, almost non-existence of assistance teachers and high turnover of the teachers were the major problem for academic achievements and effective implementation of the program. In addition to this, low commitment of teachers to teach, conventional method of teaching and assessment used by teachers were also found to be the serious problem of better academic

achievements of the preschool students. Hence, we concluded that the consideration given to improve both external and internal teachers' related factors were low.

The study revealed that teachers were not competent enough in skill of child playing, skill of learning based on songs, ability to present lessons easily, ability of presenting lesson using play, ability to draw and paint pictures and degree of loving children. In addition, result from instructional delivery methods showed that preschool teachers had serious gaps in using play method of teaching, using appropriate teaching aid, skill of using songs for teaching and method of teaching they use in the study area. From this result, the study strongly concluded that there was a serious problem in pedagogical and content knowledge and skills, which contributed to low success of the program implementation in general and low performance of preschool students in particular.

7.2 Recommendations

The study has come up with the following key recommendations in order to tackle the major possible obstacles that hinder the implementation of preschool education program in the region:

1. The study revealed that there was no unified curriculum that has been used by all preschools. In addition, there were no appropriate learning materials and teacher's guide at most centers. The existing ones were also not prepared in attractive way. Therefore, it is recommended that preschool should follow unified curriculum that can enhance the holistic development of the child. Provision of appropriate preschool learning materials and teacher's guides should be available to all preschools without preconditions. The teaching and learning materials should be prepared in easy and attractive way. It is advisable that there is a need to modify the curriculum based on the age level of children and this should be done by experts in the field and experienced professionals in teaching preschool children. Therefore, Regional Education Bureau (REB) should play pivotal role in the development, production and utilization of appropriate and relevant curriculum and teaching learning materials. Moreover, to solve the shortage of textbook and supportive teaching materials, the government and other concerned bodies like NGOs, school leaders and educators, should collaboratively apply their efforts to prepare, publish and distribute.

2. As the study indicated, there was severe shortage of trained and experienced teachers in the preschools of the region. Most of the preschools were run by grade 10 complete without the necessary training. Therefore, the REB and Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) of the region should strive to produce sufficient number of qualified preschool teachers. Besides to this, relevant short term trainings should be provided for those teachers who are working as preschool teachers without training on child teaching methodologies, care giving, establishing child friendly school environment and preparation and usage of locally available teaching materials. Moreover, continuous refreshment trainings should be provided for those who had previous training. To the further point, alongside of the diploma program, one year certificate program training should be launched to produce adequate number of preschool program teachers.

3. As the study indicated, the mean monthly remuneration of preschool teachers was 311.79 Birr showing that it was about half of the minimum wage of the country i.e. 600 Birr. Moreover, the majority of them were employed in contract base. The low remuneration paid to preschool teachers was one of the problems to attract better qualified and experienced teachers. Besides, it might be the cause for high turnover of the teachers. Therefore, the education officials should set the minimum wage of the preschool teachers which can motivate and attract qualified and experienced preschool teachers.

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