The Challenges of Government Preprimary Education Schools/Centers in Addis Ababa

By

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Abstract
Addis Ababa city government education bureau has embarked on opening pre-primary centers in government primary schools. The purpose of this paper is to find out the challenges currently prevailing in these establishments. The study was guided by three basic questions: (1) what are the major challenges facing pre-primary schools in Addis Ababa? (2) To what extent did the planned government ECCE programs worked well as intended? (3) How can the challenges of government ECCEs be overcome? Mixed methods design was employed to conduct the study. 53 government pre-primaries were randomly represented for data sources. 416 pre-primary school teachers and 53 principals and 53 parents provided the necessary data through questionnaires. Parents provided data through structured questionnaires. Observation check lists were utilized to collect data pertaining to basic school facilities and resources. The data collected was analyzed using percentiles, means, t-test and ANOVA. The study revealed that: lack of legitimate leadership, unqualified teaching staff, lack of basic resources and facilities, and absence of budget were the main challenges impeding the functioning of government pre-primaries to the level expected in Addis Ababa. The need to establish a decentralized administration and allocate separate budget for the ECCEs, set systems for preschool teachers’ professional development: flexible training programs for ECCEs head teachers and teachers, furnishing the ECCEs with the necessary facilities and materials were recommended.

Key Words: Challenges; Basic resources; Teaching materials, Play; Participation.
I. Introduction

Complex social forces, also referred as "complex family stressors like a rise in the number of single parents, societal changes due to industrialization, the increased number of women with young children entering the labor force, families with two working parents, and the step by step termination of traditional systems of child care and extended family support systems have necessitated the emergence and expansion of early child care and education (ECCE) centers/schools all over the world. (EFA, 2007, 2002, Graves, Gargoyle, & Slider, 1996).

Following the 1998 conference attended by Ministers of Education of African member states (UNESCO, 1998) it has been an urgent task for the Ethiopian government to formulate culturally appropriate and integrated ECCE policy for the first time in the history of education in Ethiopia. The development of the National Policy Framework and Strategic Guideline can be considered as an outgrowth of this conference despite the delay in time (MOE, 2010). In addition, the millennium development goals, and the resolutions of the education for all summit in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 (EFA) and various international resolutions which fueled the motivation of opening ECCE forced the Ethiopian government to embark on creating access to ECCE in government primary schools. In the present globalization and technological age, the demand for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has never been without a reason.

ECCE helps to develop the physical and mental wellbeing of children in the early years. It promotes children’s emotional and educational development, and improves the socialization process both at school and at home in the formative ages (NT, 2011).

Research shows that high-quality early care and education programs for children can have lasting positive effects such as greater school success, higher graduation rates, lower juvenile crime, decreased need for special education services later, and lower adolescent pregnancy rates (EFA, 2007). On the other hand, low-quality care can have harmful effects on language, social development, and school performance that are more difficult to amend especially for children in schools with fewer resources in later stages (Katz and Chard, 1989 as cited in Haile, 2010).

Addis Ababa, as a metropolitan city of the nation is often said relatively better in the provision of ECCE as compared to other regional states, but still, the coverage and service delivery is yet to be improved. As the EMIS (Addis Ababa Education Bureau 2014/15) indicates the net enrollment rate in kindergarten education was 78.0%, indicating 22% of the children with the age proper (4-6 years) are not getting access to ECCE programs - a fact that required urgent attention by the
City Government Education Bureau. 18% of the share of enrollment in ECCEs goes to the government pre-primaries while the rest goes to the private and public sectors (81.21% & 0.2% respectively) this clearly indicates the meager nature of the work done so far by the Education bureau.

In response to closing this gap, the Education Bureaus efforts to avail pre-primary centers within government primary schools has provided access for the unreachable poor children in the city. This had helped to drastically increase the number of pre-primary enrollments to 36,597 in this academic year (EMIS, 2009). In view of the efforts made to provide access to pre-primary education in Addis Ababa, studies conducted to investigate the challenges and prospects of ECCE centers appeared to be meager. Further, supervision and periodic reports have been indicating persistent problems existing in government ECCE centers in Addis Ababa. Examining the existing situation of government ECCEs through evidence based efforts was found to be essential. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the major challenges phasing the functioning of government ECCEs in Addis Ababa.

The main purpose of this study is to assess and identify the challenges facing ECCE programs in Addis Ababa. More specifically, the study was carried out in view of the following specific objectives:

a. To find out the working of the pre-primary programs in ECCE centers to ease the smooth transition of children from pre-primary to primary grades;

b. To identify the major challenges that currently prevails in the government pre-primary grades;

c. To provide suggestive solutions that could help to minimize the challenges prevailing in the pre-primary centers.

**Benefits of the study**

The study is expected to be significant in identifying the present challenges in the pre-primary education centers in Addis Ababa and in proposing strategies to combat the challenges to improve the smooth transition of children to primary grades. It is also believed to serve as a foundation for further similar studies to throw light on the issue and draw the attention of different stake holders.

**II. Literature Review**
Early Child Care Education in Ethiopia

The history of education in Ethiopia goes as far back as the fourth century, and is closely associated with the introduction of Christianity to the country in the fourth century which marked the founding of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Pankhurst, 1955). Since then, the Orthodox Church took the lead in expanding Christianity and the Amharic scriptures’ together with the Geez language by opening church schools that step by step evolved from the weekend religious teaching programs. While church education programs have been operational in most of the orthodox churches long ago, they step by step gave rise to village schools which later developed to private schools in the 1930s (Wagaw, T.1956).

Atse Zara Ya’aqob, who was considered the great local philosopher of the time, became an activist towards traditional church education in the 16th century and embarked on opening various church schools (Demeke, 2007:154-155). However, the first modern pre-primary education was opened in Diredewa before eight years of the establishment of the first public school (Menlik II School). The pre-primary school was established to teach children of the Ethio-French rail way line workers (Hoot et al., 2004:4). Later, the pre-primary education program was established in Asmara in 1923 by Catholic Missionaries and in Addis Ababa in 1950 by the Welfare and International Organizations (Shewakena, 1997:13). Gradually, more pre-primary schools attached to the then formal educational institutions such as the German school, the British school, Lice Geberemariam and others to serve children from the nobility in Addis Ababa. However, since 1971 few pre-primary schools (pilot projects) were constructed in major towns of the country under the Ministry of National Community Development and Social Affairs for serving children of some families. But, policy to expand pre-primary education had to wait until the period after 1994 where private investment in education was officially declared in the country.

The Rational for Early Child Care Education

Studies in the field stress that the early years of life are so critical for the acquisition of concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning (Cunah et al, 2006; Carneiro and Heckman, 2003). It is a sensitive period marked by rapid transformations in physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. According to UNESCO, the early years’ education and socialization represent a window of opportunity for a lifetime development of a person (2010). Education at this stage is a dynamic process in which early learning begets later learning
and the sooner it begins the greater the returns from it (Heckman and Klenow, 1997; Cunahetal, 2006).

**The Quality of Pre-primary education**

To provide for quality ECCE, the Ministry of Education (MOE) developed the national ECCE policy framework that lays the foundation for a holistic, comprehensive and feasible development of ECCE in Ethiopia (2010). The framework puts emphasis for the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), and as a critical period that requires due attention and a great deal of investment. Failing to provide children at this stage of development with better nutrition, health care and education deprives them of their right to develop as productive citizens, enjoy a better quality of life and eventually contribute to society’s growth. This framework was a commendable functional input to the work of Pre-primaries, but if not functional at ECCEs level it can have a negative bearing on the quality of the ECCE programs. The provision of quality pre-primary education entails multiple factors. Following are some of them.

**Curriculum**

Pre-school age education calls for the curriculum that involves a variety and balance of activities for children (Katz and Chard, 1989 as cited in Haile, 2010). A good curriculum provides activities that include opportunities for children to learn by observing and experimenting with real objects; Balance of child- and teacher initiated activities; Group projects in which cooperation can occur naturally; A range of activities requiring the use of large and small muscles; Exposure to good literature and music of children’s own cultures and of other cultures represented in the class.

Pre-school curriculum should follow and incorporate play as teaching method and this is explained by Chazzan (2002) as a positive view of the functions of play; Playing and growing are synonymous with life itself; playfulness reinforces creativity and speech development, enhances the feeling of responsibility by adhering to the set common play rules and standards. According to wood and Artfield, 2000); play helps children to explore their immediate environment, develop self-confidence and helps evoke creativity. So early childhood education should, in major part, incorporate play as a vital method of socializing children.

**Preprimary school Teachers.**
Pre-school teachers and other care givers influence the development of children more than any specific curriculum or methodology as they are responsible for immediate, face to face care and support for children (Feeney et al, 1987, cited in Yalew 2011, Chowdhury and Choudhury, 2002). To this end, teachers of young children need to have multiple child rearing skills that enable them involve in the Social, emotional, intellectual and physical development of the child. Teaching in the pre-schools demands basic knowledge in the area of health and nutrition, pedagogy, curriculum differentiation, handling of interpersonal and inter group relations with children, parents, specialists and colleagues (Miller and McDowell, 1993, Margarita and Cohen, 1984). In view of the above ECCE teachers’ competencies, the Ethiopia government in its education and training policy has given due emphasis about the importance of teacher training and competence in the medium of instruction from the kindergarten to higher education under article 3.4.5 of the 1994 Education and Training Policy (MOE, 1994).

Location and Physical Environment

The pre-school, must be located away from the crowded areas of the city/town, burial ground and main traffic for the purpose of children’s safety. The area should be dry, and have natural drainage free from water logging clean, pleasant, and well maintained building. Equally important are the presence of enough space for children to move freely within the environment. Moreover, the rooms, floors, walls, and doors, sanitary facilities, and ventilation need to be carefully handled (Chowdhury and Choudhury, 2002). With regard to the classrooms, the size of the room, the color of the walls, the type of flooring and the number of windows, areas of art, science, blocks, books, dramatic play, sensory materials, music, Woodworking, and manipulative toys and games need to be to the level expected. (Feeney, et.al, 1987: Cited in Haile, 2010).

The Ministry of Education has set standards of pre-school education such as the teacher children ratio to be 2:40 (a main teacher and an assistant teacher in a class); a pre-school must have outdoor play materials like different size balls, skipping ropes, foam Javelin, gymnastic mat, multiple purpose mats, large and small mobile toys, tricycle and small care tires. In addition, a pre-school need to have outdoor play equipment namely, swinging, merry-ground, slide, balance, boxes, crawling tunnels and climbing. Further a pre-school need to have child sized tables, and chairs and other indoor equipment and materials (MoE, 1995). Curtis (1998 as cited in Haile, 2010) stated that the physical organization of the indoor space is important but no pre-school environment is complete without taking in to account the outdoor area since together they make
a total learning environment, which caters for every child’s interests and provides materials that will be appropriate for the level of development of each child.

Equipment and materials like simple car games, books of varies types and puzzles; motor materials: balls, pull toys, riding toys, etc; manipulative materials like building sets, markers, pencils, scissors, constructional materials: blocks, building sets, and wood working materials; self-expressive materials: dolls, dress-up clothes, housekeeping toys, and musical instruments) and natural materials(sticks, leaves, rocks, sand, mud, water etc.) are important for the wholesome growth and development of the child.

**Parent Involvement**

Open communication with the parents about the child is essential throughout the years. The improvement of children’s day to day learning can be communicated with parents through a variety of methods: Notes, Telephone calls, Sending homework samples, classroom visitation, conferences, report card and etc.

Parents and teachers must work together for better understanding of each other; guide the children cooperatively for more improved growth. Home-school relationship can be improved through, home visits, parents, interviews, and meetings, parents participation in school programs and developing material for parents and training. In particular, the successful education of children with special needs is dependent up on the full involvement of parents. Thus, parents should be seen as equal partners in the pre-school educational process and, if otherwise, the result could be a failure (Chowdhury and choudhury 2002; 155).

**Opportunities and Challenges**

The importance of early childhood care and education (ECCE) is now widely accepted by the City Government education Bureau and the public at large in Addis Ababa. The education Bureau has taken the lead in opening ECCE centers in the primary schools and this was a commendable opportunity in terms of cost and in terms of using the existing resources in the primary schools.

There are 164 pre-primary centers in the primary grades now (EMIS, 2015). However, 52 of the primary schools have not yet opened ECCE centers and, as anyone can imagine, children from poor families in the neighborhood of these school would not have any option except joining the “O” classes where good foundations might not be laid for their future education as this program is provided only for one year. Yet, the education Bureau has ample opportunities to work with none government organizations to secure the necessary resources and expertise to expand ECCE
centers in Addis Ababa. However, the challenge will be availing new ECCES in the primary schools and furnishing them with the necessary human and material sources.

III. Methods

Design
This study is a descriptive survey in that it aims to identify and describe the challenges that prevail in the government Pre-primary schools. Mixed methods research design, which comprises both quantitative and qualitative approaches, has been used. Mixed methods research approach provides more comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative research alone; because it helps answer questions that cannot be answered by either of them alone (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007).

Population
Teachers, parents and ECCE coordinators in government preprimary centers were the target population for this study. All teachers, ECCE coordinators, and parents in the sample preprimaries participated in providing the necessary information.

Sampling
With the use of a simple random lottery method five Sub Cities were selected namely: Akaki, Arada, and Bole, Lideta, and Nefas Silk sub cities. There were 53 preprimary centers in These sub cities and all were considered for data sources. 416 teachers in these sub cities were taken as data sources. ECCE coordinators of each preprimary center and one parent representative were also taken as data sources. In total, 522 teachers, ECCE coordinators, and parents participated in the study.

Instrumentation
Four different types of data collection instruments were used to secure the required information from the ECCEs. These were questionnaire for teachers, interview guide for center heads, structured interviews for parents and check lists for scanning the facilities in the ECCEs. The questionnaire was self-developed after consulting relevant literature in the area. It composed of 22 close ended items rating on five point Likert type scales with responses ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The questionnaire was commented by 40 data collectors at
face value. Based on the valuable comments received from the 40 data collectors, some of the items were edited for the final version of data collection.

**Data collection Procedure**

Forty data collectors were invited (4 professionals per sub city) with common consent with the sub city heads. The data collectors were trained to secure the necessary information using the data collection instruments as per the sample. Hard copies of the questionnaires were handed over to each data collector for the final field data collection. The data collected were checked and data clearing performed to exclude defective responses. The final data was coded and processed using the SPSS software.

**Data analysis**

Percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used to describe the data while independent sample t test and ANOVA were also made to see the significance differences between male and female teachers in participating parents and the impact of government ECCEs on the smooth transition of children to primary schools.

**IV. Results**

416 questionnaires were distributed to teachers, principals and parents. In total, 410 (98%) teachers responded to the tagged questionnaires’. Besides, 51 school heads (96%), and 52 (98%) parents, one each from 52 government preprimaries provided information through a structured interview. Thus, the rate of questionnaire return was the highest.

**Profile of participants**: Frequency and percentages were utilized to present the specific personal information (See table 2).

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by level of education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>ECCE Coordinators</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing value</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in table 2, 85.4% of the teachers and 37.3% of the principals hold certificates. A considerable number of teachers and principals have Diplomas (12.4% and 45.1% respectively). Similarly, 46.2% of the parents are reported to have certificates while the rest hold diplomas, but 20 parents did not indicate their literacy level. On the other hand, 3 teachers and 8 Principals were reported to have degrees and masters. On the whole, the majority of the preprimary school teachers were below the qualification standard set at national level.

Table 2: Sex of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>ECCE Coordinators</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from table 3, 96.8% of the teachers were females while very few (3.2%) were males. But, when it comes to ECCE coordinators, the proportions of the sexes appear to be better in terms of equity (60.8% female and 37.2% male coordinators). Regarding parents, the majority were female (75%) while male accounted for 25%.

**Enrollment**: The establishment of preprimary centers began in 2003 E.C. Since then, enrollment has been improving as the service provided was free of charge.

![Bar chart showing improvements in preprimary enrollment by year](image)

Figure 1
Taking 2003 E.C as the base year, enrollment in preprimary education increased by 1.7% (1978 students) during the year 2004. In 2005, the increase in enrollment rose by 15% (17,589) and reached the highest pick, while in 2006 enrollment declined by 7.5% (8,946 students) may be due to lack of awareness that free government preprimary education centers have been opened in the neighborhoods.

In 2007 enrollment began to increase (9%: 11270 students) may be due to the launching of the school feeding program for the first time in Addis Ababa by the first lady: her Excellency w/o Roman Tesfaye in collaboration with the Addis Ababa city administration education bureau.

It is important to note that, had the city administration education bureau, in collaboration with UNICEF, not opened preprimary centers in the primary schools, all those students (158,723 students) could have remained without any preparation for primary grades.

**Pupil Class Room Ratio (PCR)**

Classroom child ratio and information on the capacity of these classrooms was collected. As can be seen from table 4, only few teachers and principals (9% & 4%) endorsed that the class room child ratio meets the standard 20-30. The majority of teachers indicated that the number of children per classroom ranges from 30 to 60 (79%). The opinions of the ECCE coordinators appear to conform to the views of teachers regarding the PCR (78%). In many classes, however, the classroom-student ratios were found to be significantly higher than the suggested or desirable ratio (30 students with two care givers).

**Location**

It is expected that schools and the classrooms should be situated in such a place where teaching-learning activities can take place in a peaceful atmosphere. With regard to **Table 4: Location of pre-primaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

this, over half of the teachers (52%) and principals (58.8%) said that the location of the preprimaries was convenient and safe for children to learn. It seems that some of the preprimaries were located in areas not free from polluted and stinky environments, noisy areas that
can disturb the learning of children, unsafe roads and environments that are not child friendly. On top of this, in response to the question regarding whether the “in school area” is enough for children to learn and play, 55% of them said that the school compound was enough to accommodate children to play and/or learn while 45% of them appeared to disagree.

**Curriculum**

The quality of the curriculum and learning provisions are important for quality care and education for pre-primary grades. In line with this, the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia developed a national Syllabus (curriculum) for government pre-primaries which was organized under the major themes: Language development, Social and Emotional development, and mathematical skills relevant to the age level of students. (Syllabus, 2010). Information on the relevance of the syllabus was sought for the study (table10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourages active learning</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>3.8897</td>
<td>1.10842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages group work</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>3.7010</td>
<td>1.06948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes art, drama, dance, songs</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>3.8284</td>
<td>1.0609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses play as a method of teaching</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>4.1520</td>
<td>1.06079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains balanced activities</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>3.4093*</td>
<td>1.06155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Key: Decimals were rounded to the nearest numeral, 1= Very inadequate, 2= inadequate, 3= undecided, 4= adequate, 5= Very adequate.

Since the ultimate goal of ECCE is to give young children desirable social experience rather than formal instruction’, whether children in preprimary grades should use a fixed text books are yet debatable (CAMPE, 2013). In Addis Ababa as well, all the government pre-primary teachers use a standard Syllabus/curriculum prepared by the MOE. To this effect, the majority of the teachers rated the syllabus as relevant for pre-primary grades in that it encourages active learning and group work (mean=3.8897, and 3.7010 respectively). The teachers further reported that art contents like drawing, drama and songs are well included, and play as a method of teaching is emphasized (mean=3.82843, 4.1520 respectively).

Teachers were asked to report if they used other children’s books.

Table 6: Children’s books
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to this the majority of teachers (67.6%) witnessed that they use other children’s books while a considerable number of teachers said that they use no other materials (table 11). An interview conducted with the head of ECCE at the education bureau revealed that teachers use additional materials prepared by the education bureau and these include the teachers guide prepared by the MOE for the three levels (play group, nursery, and Kindergarten, 2012). In addition to these, teachers use supplementary books prepared at national level (2014), and different story books developed by the education bureau (2016). However, 32.4% of the teachers disagreed to this statement.

**ECCE Materials**

Educational materials that give children first-hand experience are essential for ECCEs. Information on the use of these materials was collected. Overall, 19.69% of the ECCEs had one or more of these materials.

**Figure 2: Educational Materials**

As indicated by teachers and the school principals (Figure 2), little proportions of the ECCEs have play materials (26.6% & 23% respectively), and the lowest proportion (10.5% and 11.8%)
had physical exercise items. Materials like number chart, wall charts, picture charts and the like seem to be inadequate when compared to the proportion of other materials (20.9 & 30%).

Of the other category of materials, chart materials were reported to be moderately available in the preprimaries (15.7% & 25.4%). Toys, irrespective of the type (wood, clay, plastics, and jute) were reported to be found and used in the ECCEs (23.2%, & 9.8%). It seems that some materials were inadequate to serve all children. It is also interesting to note how teachers manage the teaching in the classroom with inadequate materials.

**Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Facilities (WASH)**

Conducive learning environment for preprimary school children also requires the accessibility of sanitation; and availability of drinking water for the health and safety of children. To this effect, the mean response of the teachers and ECCE coordinators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Mean value for facilities in ECCEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separate drinking water in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1= very low; 2= low; 3= undecided; 4= high; 5= very high

Was compared (table 7). As shown above, the availability of separate drinking water for children in the ECCEs was inadequate (mean=2.5585, & m=2.8125 for both teachers and ECCE coordinators respectively); water taps appear to be suitable to the age and maturity level of children (mean>3). As the mean shows, toilet facilities appear to be insufficient in the ECCEs (m= 2.8854, 2.7917 respectively). Besides, hand wash facilities were confirmed to be in short supply in the ECCEs (m= 2.9463, 2.6939).

Parents participation in ECCEs is a powerful way to establish continuity between the family and school environments. In light of this, the data in figure 3 revealed that parents’ involvement is low in some of the ECCEs (33.7% & 33.4 % respectively). However, majority of the teachers...
and the principals indicated that a modest participation of parents exist in the ECCEs (26.8% & 39% respectively). Furthermore, there were also a considerable number of teachers and principals who indicated that parent’s participation was high in the government ECCEs (38.3% & 27.4 respectively). This indicates that the level of parents’ involvement in the ECCEs varied across the schools.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to find out which of the teachers, male or female, in the government ECCEs more involved parents in the education of children, by assuming that there is no difference between the sexes to involve parents. The results (table 8) indicated that

Table 8: Independent samples t test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>t tabulated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.2308</td>
<td>1.2351</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>0.485</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>2.9975</td>
<td>1.1831</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<0.05

the existence of no evidence indicating differences in male and female teachers in involving parents.

The ECCE program has two goals for young children: to increase their school readiness and to facilitate their on-time enrolment in primary school. In light of this, analysis of data obtained from ECCE coordinators, and parents showed that a large proportion of the ECCE principals and parents (74.5%, 86.5% respectively) confirmed the positive impact of the ECCE program in promoting the readiness of children to join primary grades, and 48.8% of the teachers...
acknowledged the program as well. On the other hand, a considerable number of the teachers (40%) indicated that the impact was low. Teachers’ perceptions of the relevance of government ECCE program was tested using the analysis of ANOVA, with the assumption that there exist no differences among teachers from all the sub-cities (table 9). The results indicated that \(F = 70.707\) there is a significant difference between teachers perceptions’ of the impact of government ECCEs across the sub cities \(p<0.05\). Therefore, teachers did not equally acknowledge the role of the government ECCEs in Addis Ababa.

**Analysis of qualitative data**

Additional information has been secured from parents and school principals through interviews. The qualitative data obtained was coded and organized under the themes: ECCE setting, Resources, and capacity building. Parents were asked to report the proximity of the location of the ECCE centers. All the parents interviewed said that the ECCEs were located in the same neighborhoods as their residence, except a parent who reported that the ECCE his daughter attended (Nefas silk) was in the adjacent neighborhoods. These ideas of parents were supported by the school principals. It appears that ECCEs locations were not problems both for parents and their children. Parents and head teachers said that some of the primary schools within which the government ECCEs opened was situated along streets congested with traffic noises that disturb attentive learning. Besides, in some of the pre-primaries no separate arrangements were made (separate toillettes, separate & safe gates to the schools, separate areas/building, etc.). Cleanliness of floors and walls of classrooms were looked at. In many of them, the walls and rooms of the ECCEs were reported to be unclean and full of dirt, and in some cases the walls of some of them were reported to be shared with private residents (Akaki). As the head teacher

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>361.849</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>90.462</td>
<td>70.707</td>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>518.154</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>1.279</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>880.002</td>
<td>409</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
from Arada explained, the ECCE was not spacious enough to accommodate the growing number of children every year. Outdoor activities for children were becoming impossible, and play materials like toys, and equipment are in short supply. Large classrooms characterize almost all of the pre-primaries in the sub city. A small number of schools had classes with only around 20-30 students, but many ECCEs in the sub city had classes with as many as 80 students, and this conforms to the results of the quantitative data (table 7). Furthermore, as the head teacher from Bole indicated, the classrooms, in major part, were narrow to accommodate the large number of children flowing in to join the ECCEs every academic year. Consequently, as the head teachers expressed the large class sizes and, in many cases, the absence of a dedicated classroom or space for pre-primary classes, did not allow for the creation of the necessary physical ambiance, including play space, activity corners and placing of decorations on the walls. Thus, play with stimulating objects and physical games, practice and participation in play activities had been low. This, they said, is an impediment to providing high quality pre-primary education. Preschool education program cannot be successful in the absence of sufficient instructional materials and equipment. To this end, parents and the head teachers noted several challenges associated with meager nature of resources and facilities. Some school heads felt that insufficient teaching and learning materials had been allocated to each pre-primary. A school head from Lideta sub city noted that while the program usually took place out of doors, the materials available were not always enough for children. Besides, the play grounds could not be smoothened as the ECCE center was working with zero budget. Other ECCE centers have also endorsed that no separate budget is allocated to the ECCEs except for the primary school. Activities like matching, sorting and comparing things using color, shape, size and function require sufficient materials and equipment. Visual and audio materials and equipments that the children can learn by touching were required. For example, the head teacher from Akaki explained that Television was required but was not available until the interview. Thus, if there were no budget, these facilities could not be availed in schools.

Teachers are time and time again considered to be the single most important external factor contributing to quality education (Peter, 2006). Dedicated classrooms and teachers with specialized and appropriate training, provision of educational materials and increased supervision and feedback mechanism may help improve their present situation in terms of preparing children for quality pre-primary education. In services training of teachers is important for updating teacher’s qualification. In connection with this, the head teachers from Nefas silk lafto sub city indicated that on job training for
teachers were inadequate in the pre-primaries while the principal from Lideta indicated that in-service training for teachers was none existent. Besides, the parents interviewed explained that they have never attended any training. This shows that teachers’ professional competence through training in the areas of pedagogy, curriculum development, knowledge and understanding of parent-school relations and parenting, and the handling of children’s behavior, as the interviewee said, seemed to be inadequate in the ECCEs.

**IV Discussion**

Over the past decades, promoting holistic early learning and development to prepare children for primary school entry has been the main agenda for success in later learning. In relation to this, the city government of Addis Ababa education Bureau embarked on opening pre-primary centers within the existing government primary schools in the capital since 2011. This study focused on the challenges of these government preprimaries.

The objective of the study was to find out the working of the government ECCEs in Addis Ababa as explained by the existence of sufficient material and manpower resources, training and adequacy of teachers, relevant curriculum, site and building, classroom physical environment, and the relationship of parents with the ECCEs.

Research in the field indicates that effective implementation of curricula may prove to be easier with well trained, younger and more flexible teachers in the ECCEs (EFA, 2007, McMullen, M. B. 1998, 1999). With regard to this, the study revealed that teachers have been fulfilled quantitatively and majority of the pre-primary teachers had certificates, and did not meet the minimum qualifications requirements (90% certificate and only 10% diploma) as stipulated in the Ethiopian per-primary education strategy (MOE, 2007). Although the national strategy puts teachers’ licensing as a requirement for teaching in the ECCEs, teachers’ licensing has not yet been in place. Besides, in-service training of teachers and principals were lacking, and Parental education that focuses on awareness-raising and training on the roles and responsibilities in bringing up children had been lacking.

The curriculum for ECCEs was organized under the major themes: Language development, Social and Emotional development, and mathematical skills relevant to the age level of students (MOE, 2010). However, the strategic operational plan developed by the MOE stresses teachers’ licensing mechanisms
to be ensured for proper implementation and effectiveness of the ECCEs. In this regard, all the government preprimary schools in Addis Ababa followed and utilized the official Syllabus prepared by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2010). The quality of the curriculum in terms of including active learning and group work, balanced activities and play as a method of engaging children, drama, music, and drawing were found to be acceptable. However, a considerable number of government pre-primaries did not have other supplementary children’s’ books other than the syllabus (32.4%).

The opening of government pre-primary centers in the primary schools helped to accommodate children of the disadvantaged families’ to provide the necessary readiness for the regular primary classes. In this regard, the situation in Addis Ababa appeared to be promising. A dramatic increase in pre-primary enrolment rate was observed since 2011, as this was the year the Education Bureau decided to push preprimary education. The increase was more than a quarter of annual enrollment during 2011. The rate of increase in preprimary enrollment was noticed at a similar pace for the children of both genders until 2013. However, the rate of increase in enrollment declined until 2015 for unknown reasons.

Studies have shown that pre-school must be located away from the crowded areas of the city/town, burial ground and main traffic for the purpose of children’s safety and the vicinity must also permit any future expansion, a raised area, dry, and have natural drainage free from water logging clean, pleasant, and well maintained building (1998 cited in Haile, 2011; Chowdhury and Chuoldhury, 2002). However, the study revealed that some of the preprimaries were situated along main streets congested with traffic noises that disturb attentive learning. In the neighborhoods of some, one observed waste containers and open drainages unsafe for children to walk along and this was another challenge discovered.

The physical environment of classroom has a profound effect on individual child; the group as a whole and on the others needs to meet standards (Haile, 2010 Feeney et.al, 1987). But, this study disclosed that the class rooms were narrow to accommodate the large number of children and problems of large classes existed, in many cases, the absence of a dedicated classroom or space for pre-primary classes, did not allow for the creation of the necessary physical ambiance, lack of adequate spaces, neatness, lack of enough napping rooms and safety problems of the playgrounds in the preschools were also other major challenges of the government ECCEs.
Preschool education program cannot be successful in the absence of sufficient instructional materials and equipment. However, lack of basic facilities and materials helpful to teach children that contribute for their holistic development especially in the areas of socio-emotional, motor, creativity, thinking and problem solving skills coupled with uncomfortable playgronds, insufficient WASH facilities and unclean toilets characterized the government ECCEs.

A substantial body of research pointed out that the interconnection between the home and the school and parental deep involvement within the connection is highly critical to promote preschool children’s success (Cardona et al., 2012),(Chowdhury&Chowdhury, 2002) in multiple dimensions of development including academic achievement (ECCENPFE, 2010). However, parent-ECCE relations appeared to low in Addis Ababa.

V. Conclusion

Although this research could have its own limitations in terms of the sample population, time, instruments, etc. it did reveal interesting findings relating to the challenges of government ECCEs in Addis Ababa.

A large number of teachers and school heads were not qualified to teach in the ECCEs as per the national qualification standards. Lack of basic facilities and materials helpful to teach children that contribute for their holistic development especially in the areas of socio-emotional, motor, creativity, thinking and problem solving skills, and uncomfortable playgronds were some of the challenges. Shortage of basic infrastructures (lack of and narrowness of classrooms, napping rooms), facilities (lack of tables, chairs and shelves), and teaching, learning and playing materials such as books, toys, blocks, puzzles and other related supplies necessary to teach children about all domains of development and lack of adequate spaces, neatness, and safety problems were the main challenges of the preschools.

Low level of parental involvement, inadequacy of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and absence of budget and lack of decentralized leadership were identified as major challenges of ECCEs in Addis Ababa that impeded the working of government ECCEs to the required standard.

Recommendation

In light of the preceding findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were forwarded.
1. The findings of the study showed that pre-primary education centers were directly responsible to the primary school leadership, and this was not convenient for the centers to plan and budget their preprimary education activities as required. Thus, there is a strongest need to establish a decentralized administration and allocate separate budget for the ECCEs, and set systems for preschool teachers’ professional development and motivation to retain them in the preschools.

2. This study revealed that most of the head teachers and teachers did not meet the qualification standards stated in the 2010 ECCE strategy. Teachers’ professional commitment with knowledge from pedagogy and child growth and development, skills in structuring curriculum for flexible use, and knowledge and understanding on the potential of parent school relations are essential for the success of the ECCEs programs. Therefore, flexible training programs for ECCEs head teachers and teachers are earnestly required.

3. One of the central findings of this study was lack of basic facilities and materials helpful to teach children that contribute for their holistic development. These included, among others, classrooms, and availability of other needed spaces coupled with large classes which could impede proper sitting arrangements for learning. With inadequate physical facilities and teaching materials, early child readiness for primary school education might not be successful. It is necessary that the education bureau, in collaboration with parents and stakeholders work to construct additional classrooms and, or establish new ECCE centers and furnish them with the necessary facilities and materials.

4. The findings from this study showed that most of the schools did not have adequate drinking water facility and sanitary latrines. In some cases, these were common to all students (pre-primary and primary) which sometimes created difficulty since they failed to conform to children’s age and height. Thus, Age and height appropriate water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities need to be availed in the government pre-primaries.

5. Educating children has never been an easy task without sharing the task with children’s parents. Hence, parents and teachers need to work cooperatively for the better achievement of children. Hence, it is recommended that teachers should enhance the awareness of parents about the importance of their involvement in preschool and home based children learning activities through different means: reading stories and books to their children and assisting in doing home tasks, etc.
REFERENCES
