

Challenges and Opportunities of Pre-Primary Education at West Gojjam Zone Selected Towns, West Ethiopia

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Abstract

The Purpose of this study was to assess the challenges and opportunities of pre-primary education in west Gojjam Zone selected towns by coming with pre-primary education types (government and non-government pre-primary school centers). The study has used a qualitative method research design to address its objectives; Qualitative data were collected and analyzed. In this qualitative method of the study, focus group discussion (FGD) and a total number of 20 interviewees participated from 16 preschool centers. Participants of the study include preschool education officer, principals, vice principals, teachers, and assistant teachers. From the result part challenges and opportunities of pre-primary education, non-government centers being much stronger than government centers. Despite this, achievements of and opportunities for preschool education in the study area were observed, providing hope for the future. In doing so, some resources are limited in Government centers where as better in non- government pre-primary education center. To have alleviating the gaps, this study also provided important recommendations.

Keywords: Challenges, Opportunities, pre-primary education, Government, Non-government

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Education is a powerful instrument to bring about sustainable development (social and economic development coupled with environmental protection) in any country and in the world (UNESCO, 2005). Preprimary education is important because, early childhood is the prime human developmental stage in which fundamental attitudes and values are formed in relation to the three components of sustainable development, i.e., social development, economic development and environmental protection (Lemma, 2014).

ECCE or preschool programs aim to provide early developmental and educational activities to foster children's social and cognitive maturation, and to help prepare them for school (MoE 2002). Preschool education has become one of the potential inputs to the overall improvement of quality of education and reduction of drop out and repetition rates in later stages of schooling and it is believed to lead to higher enrollments of students (MoE, 2010).

In Ethiopia, preschool education covers programs that children aged 4-6 years enrolled in private, government and religious based centers. The Education and Training Policy (1994), and the National Policy Framework (2010) have indicated that preprimary education program must be comprehensive in its nature addressing the holistic development of children in the domains of cognitive, social and emotional developments. According to the National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (2010), one of the major goals of the program is to enable children to acquire basic skills in the area of pre-reading, pre-writing, counting, arithmetic and social competency as a strategy to make them ready for formal schooling (Lemma, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Preschool education is the subject of considerable debate and interest among governments and politicians in all parts of the world. International organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO have been stressing the importance of providing quality preprimary education to all children, not only for those from less-advantaged backgrounds but for all children.

Centers of preschool education in Ethiopia are predominantly established and run by NGOs, communities, private institutions, and faith-based organizations. Hence, one could safely conclude that the government's role in the sector has been so minimal at least in terms of public expenditure. The government has mainly been accountable for developing curriculum, training teachers, and providing supervisory support (Educational Statistics Annual Abstract, 2007/08; Lemma, 2014). However, it appears that the government has come to notice the existence of such gaps very recently. And now, the government is opening its own preprimary school centers in some parts of the country. There are some studies done regarding preschool education and early childhood care in Ethiopia (for example, Assefa, 2014; Lemma, 2014; Tamirat, 2014). However, most of such studies focused on the city of Addis Ababa and other major cities in the country. To the researchers' knowledge, there

had been no such research conducted in west Gojjam zone towns. Therefore, conducting this study will be very helpful in terms of filling the gap. Accordingly, the current research attempted to fill the knowledge gap by answering the following essential research questions:

1. What are the major aspects of preschool education in government and non-government preschool centers, in west Gojjam Zone?
2. Which are the major opportunities of preschool education in west Gojjam Zone?
3. What are the major barriers and challenges for preschool education in west Gojjam Zone?

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The general objective of this study is to assess the challenges and opportunities of pre-primary education in west Gojjam Zone, west Ethiopia?

Specific Objectives

1. To explore ways of preschool education in government and non-government centers, in west Gojjam Zone?
2. To find out the major opportunities and achievements of preschool education in west Gojjam Zone?
3. To identify the major challenges for pre-primary education in west Gojjam Zone?

Significance of the Study

It has highlights fill knowledge gaps and future directions regarding preschool education. Input for policy and practice could also be gained from the results of the study. Important directions will also be made to various stakeholders based on the research findings of the study. These could include teachers, parents, education officers and others in the field of education (psychologists and social workers), researchers, policy makers and analysts, and government officials.

Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited to west Ethiopia Amhara Regional state, west Gojjam Zone towns.

Review of Related Literatures

Meanings of pre-primary Education

Pre-primary education is now widely used program even though there have been facing so many problems. Preschool education helps children's survival, growth, development and learning-including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth up to primary school in all forms of learning settings (UNESCO, 2004).

Advantages of Pre-primary Education

Pre-primary education gives good child development outcomes that set the foundation for lifelong learning and help in the monitoring of health and nutrition status during this critical period of development (UNESCO, 2004). As Young Lives (2010) found that high-quality early childhood care and education is a core strategy for poverty reduction. There is evidence of high returns from pre-primary education investments, which can contribute to global policy priorities such as tackling child malnutrition, increasing children's successful participation in school, and strengthening economic development.

Young Lives also highlighted the importance of pre-school services for children aged 4 to 5 ensures the most disadvantaged children with quality services and adequate governance if Pre-primary education and care policies are to live up to their potential as a strategy for poverty reduction. Thus, supporting children and families early in life can help to interrupt the cycle of poverty (Young Lives, 2010).

Development of pre-primary education

The Latin America nations and the Caribbean lead the developing world in the provision of pre-school education. Some 62% of that region's pre-school-age children are in education programmes – compared to 35% in the developing countries of East Asia and the Pacific; 32 % in South and West Asia; 16 % in the Arab states; and 12% in sub-Saharan Africa, (UNESCO, 2006).

In addition, many countries have no Pre-primary education programmes addressing the diverse needs (health, nutrition, care and education) of children in the first three years of life. Few countries have established national frameworks to coordinate preschool education programmes (EFA, 2007).

Pre-primary education progress in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, out of the total 73 million populations more than 33 million (over 45%) are children below fifteen

(Population Census, 2007). However, their access to education, health, nutrition and other resources are limited. For example, in 2005, Infant mortality rate stood at 77 and under-five mortality rate was 123 per thousand live births (DHS, 2005). That means 1 in every 13 children die before reaching the age of one, while 1 in 8 does not survive up to its fifth birthday (DHS, 2005).

Likewise, with nearly one in two (47%) children under five years of age categorized as being chronically malnourished; about 83% children with iodine deficiency, and 39% children estimated to have goitre. The majority of births in Ethiopia (94%) are delivered at home. Over 7 out of 10 mothers do not receive antenatal care. In 2003, there were an estimated 5.4 million (13%) orphan children.

UNESCO (2007) reported that in Ethiopia pre-school is a minority experience although Ethiopia has made rapid progress towards achieving universal enrolment and gender parity at the primary school level (Young Lives, 2005). To help fill the gap at the level, the government is encouraging the involvement of other partners, including the private sector. Private preschools are the main option for all children in Ethiopia, but access to such schools strongly favours children from more advantaged families around the urban. Although the number of pre-primary schools is increasing every year; their distribution is limited to the major urban centres. In 2005/06 out of the estimated 6,959,935 children of the appropriate age group (4-6) only about 186,728 children have been reported to have access to pre-primary education in 1,794 kindergartens all over the country.

The level of enrolment is therefore, negligible when compared to the appropriate age group. The Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for kindergarten level is 2.7% in 2005/06 which is a little higher than the previous year's 2.3%. This means, 97.3 % of the eligible children at these levels do not have access to pre-primary education (Government of Ethiopia, 2007). In 2007/2008, the preschool education enrolment rate was 3.9 % (MOE, 2008/2009). This statistics also show that at national level, 22.9% of pupils enrolled in grade 1 had left school before reaching grade 2. Similarly, the latest Kindergarten statistical data of the Ethiopian ministry of education of 2010 showed that the national enrolment rate has risen to 4.8%. With the exception of the three regions such as Addis Ababa (85%), Diredawa (23%), and Hareri (15.3%) almost all regions look to have similar enrolment scores.

Low enrolment rate of pre-education is supposed to be one of the major contributing factors of educational wastage. For instance, in Ethiopia, the quality indicators of primary schools such as repetition rate, dropout rate and completion rates of grade 5 and 8 were resulted to be 4.9%, 18.6%, 75.6% and 47.8% respectively.

Research Methods

Design

In this study Qualitative method research design was employed.

Study Area

This research had conducted in west Gojjam Zone selected towns found in Amhara region west Ethiopia.

Population

The population of this study is all pre-school education centers in west Gojjam zone selected towns (16 pre-school education centers), Burie town (6 pre-school education centers) and Finote Selam town 10 pre-school education centers).

Sample

Purposive sampling technique was used based on experience and knowledge of participants. For the in-depth interviews, efforts were made to implement the idea of data saturation to determine the size of participants. This means, such data from each center/town would be collected until a point of data saturation was reached (until no more new information was available). Interviewees for teachers, principals, and town and zone level education officers. In addition, excepting preschool officers, participants were from 16 centers, 7 non-government and 9 government ownership.

Tools

In-depth Observations, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interviews were designed to be providing with pre-school teachers, principals; and other education professionals (education experts).

Data Collection Procedure

The first step in the data collection was contacting the principal of each center to explain about the research and arrange schedules for delivering consent forms, provide interviews, FGD and observations.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis steps suggested by Creswell (2007), steps include: organizing the data based on their

type; transcribing the data verbatim, in the local/Amharic language, translating the transcription into the English language, reading the data thoroughly to have some insight into the general image of the situation.

Ethical Consideration

Legal Permission and consent was given to collect the desire data were sought at different levels from different parties. And, finally, each individual participant was asked for his or her informed consent.

Results

Background information of the Study

In this study a total number of 16 pre-school education centers participated, seven governments and nine non-government owned centers. Of these centers, six (6) were from Burie town and ten (10) were from Finote Selam town. Participants were from zone/town pre-primary school, bureaus.

In this study Participants were involved, which are - 10 female teachers, 4female and 2 male principals as well as 1 female and 3 male education officers. Participants having different degrees of work experience in pre-primary school education. The experiences of participants ranged from 4 to 12 years.

In the case of respondents' level of education, 5 'certificate' level of education which is similar to or comparable with 10th +1, 10th +2, and 12th complete education. The second big proportion of respondents was found to have 7 'diploma' level educations which is similar to with 10th+3, 10th +4 education. 4 of the respondents had a first degree similar with 12th +3.

Background of Pre-primary Education in the study Area

Pre-primary school education in the study areas classified as government-based and non-government-based centers that provide service to children aged 3/4 to 6. According to west Gojjam Zone preschool education officer, there are three approaches of providing the government-based preschool education, i.e., 0-classes, *Tabia* (satellite stations), and child-to-child learning. The non-government preschools could have some variation in terms of ownership; some are owned by private individuals or groups.

Before the year 2016, though it was included in the education policy of the country, the provision of preschool education was not emphasized by the government Ethiopia; but it had left to the private sector. In this case, students from low socio economic status groups joined elementary school without any experience of pre-primary education. This was a disadvantage not only for the students, but also for the schools and the country's education. It was in 2015/6, that the federal government started to focus on it, to make it part of the formal education program in the country. The major reason for this decision was the government's observation (based on a study conducted by Addis Ababa University) of the failure of students who could not read and write their name properly after getting 8th and 10th grades. The proposed solution for this problem has emphasizing on pre-primary education.

The government proposed two alternatives to 0-Classes, in case of long distance from home to school or unavailability of primary schools around. The first one is to use *Tabia* (satellite stations) as preschool centers. Here, rented rooms or buildings from other organizations (e.g., religious institutions, *Idir* (*local cooperation*) and farmer training centers) could be used as Preschool centers. Such preschool centers are supported by one government primary school and their teachers are hired on contractual basis. A single primary school could support one to four satellite preschool stations. In such schools, facilities (desks, toilet, reading materials etc) are not fulfilled and rented class rooms could be changed frequently time to time.

Non-government preschool centers were under government supervision and they had overall similar structure; they taught children aged 3/4 up to 6. Standards had been set and each non-government preschool center was evaluated based on the standards. The structure of such centers could be divided into there, i.e. Nursery (3/4 years old), Lower Kindergarten/LKG (5yearsold), and Upper Kindergarten/UKG (6 years old).

Nature of Preschool Students

The number of students in a class ranged from 30 to 52 (that most government centers/five out of seven merged two classes into one). There was no fee to attend such schools. Most students in such schools were largely from families with low economic background. Yet, though there were no tuition fees, families made their own contribution to the centers either in cash or in kind, to make the centers better places for the children.

In non-government centers, students were aged three to six. The number of students per class ranged from 25 to 45. Families of students in such centers were required to pay monthly fee. Most students in such centers were from families that had stronger economy (from middle or upper class). However, it was found that almost all of the non-government centers supported children from poor families; they had students who were studying for free or for reduced fees. In some centers also children of staff members paid half the tuition fee.

Preprimary school Teachers

Preprimary teachers are important elements of the preschool education in the study areas. In this study it was found that most of the preschool teachers in the two towns were females. Some participants asserted that preschool teachers should be females because females have maternal instinct behavior. Preschool teachers can be classified into two categories, i.e., teachers in government centers and teachers in non-government centers.

Preschool teachers in government centers are called *kedeme-medebegna* or *amechach* (pre-primary facilitators). There could be two or three teachers in a government owned center, one teacher per class, with no assistant teachers. Sometimes, four and five year old children are merged in one class, making the number of classes in a school two. In non-government centers, the number of teachers (with certificate and diploma) could range from five to eight, depending on the size of the center. Most non-government centers had one teacher per class with one assistant teacher.

Services provided for Preschool Students

The major service provided by all preschool centers is teaching – learning, play based games, songs as instruments, ethics and hygiene were emphasized. In government centers, children aged 4 to 6 were expected to be in three different classes (4 years old, 5 years old, and 6 years old). However, because of lack of resources and teachers, in most government centers, the first two age groups are merged together. On the contrary, in most non-government centers, children aged three/four were put in a same class called nursery class; children aged five were in LKG/GK1; and children aged six were put in UKG/KG2.

In both center types children learn five days per week, except holidays, family events and the summer (two months). However, the amount of time they spent in schools per day somehow varied in different school types. Children in government centers spent around 6 hours per day in schools, from 2:30 local time until 9:30 local time.

In all centers, children attend few short classes (less than 30 minute per class) and have so many break (playing and feeding) times. In the case of playing, there is a huge difference between government centers and non-government centers; non-government centers had a much better playing facilities and playing areas. In some government centers, Montessori materials were available. In government centers there were very few indoor playing materials (mostly prepared by teachers themselves).

Beyond from teachers, most preschool centers did not have other professionals (psychologists, nurses, social workers) in their centers.

Efforts were made by many centers to have separate compounds for preschool children. This separation was emphasized to avoid bullying by the older children and to prevent preschool-aged children from hating learning as a result of bullying.

Curriculum and Medium of Instructions

All government and non-government preschool centers had used curriculum that was prepared by the government national language of Ethiopia, in Amharic language. In addition, it was observed that all preschool centers prepared lesson plans to deliver their daily teaching-learning process.

Opportunities of Preprimary Education

This program has social - behavioral benefits and academic benefits. This is which was mentioned by many participants, is social - behavioral benefits. In line with this, many participants discussed how preschool education helped children change/improve their behavior and develop their social skills. Making children stop crying when taken to centers; enabling students to listen to others; helping children to have a better discipline; making children learn how to respect others; greet people; enabling children to say thank you; helping children develop self-awareness, and helping children develop confidence. One major reason for these changes and developments was that most preschool centers also taught their children ethics in addition to academic contents.

The second one is, mentioned by almost all participants was academic benefits. Here participants mentioned the importance of preschool education for children in terms of enabling them to read, write, speak, understand, do basic math, and know about their environment. Most participants also underlined the positive contribution of preschool education for the quality of regular programs (primary, secondary, and tertiary education), by putting strong foundation for the future. According to participants, preschool education provides children with experience/exposure to the formal education system and the school environment, helping them to easily adapt in the future. The immediate impact of preschool education on children's later school performance was clearly seen at grade one, when preschool children were compared with other children who did not get preschool education. According to participants, the difference between these two groups of children was huge; children without preschool education had to start from scratch, from how to hold a pencil properly. Some participants also discussed the importance of preschool education in terms of contributing to solve primary school children's reading problems. Other participants also associated the importance of preschool education with low dropout

rates at their school. Another important example of the benefit of preschool education was students' performance in grade eight national examinations.

Challenges of Preprimary Education

These major problems were the main barriers/challenges; infrastructure and resource related problems, parents and teachers' related problems, students-related problems and government related problems.

Infrastructure and resource related problems include specific problems such as: shortage of playground and classrooms, absence of attractive area for children, absence of eating rooms, problems with rented houses/rooms - this prevented some centers from accepting more students and others to merge students with different age groups; problem with toilet, lack of books (absence of books for children especially in government centers); shortage of teachers, absence of assistant teachers in government centers because of low salary for teachers in government and non-government centers, and difficult physical environments inside and outside of the center (which are dusty or muddy areas).

Parents related problems also include specific problems such as: parents' lack of awareness (about their roles, refusing to send children to school (lack of trust); problem to meet parents (some were busy, and neglect full); low parent participation in meeting, parents moving to another area/city making children drop out of school; and some parents did not bring and take their children on time.

Teachers-related problems also, absence/shortage of trained teachers in early child hood care education, draining of teachers place to place for the sake of salary; lack of on-the-job training for teachers in both types of centers, and teachers involve for temporary period and come with non-teaching profession.

Students related problems include difficult to handle children especially at first; children may get sick and accidents could happen when they play. Children might fight in class each other.

Opportunities for Preschool Education

Except three (3) centers that said there was no conducive environment (government vs. non-government). Recently the government emphasis on preschool or preprimary education, teachers' determination and willingness to work, communities and parents growing interest in preschool education. Priority to be given to preschool needs (in schools that have other regular programs), increasing number of students, and possibility of attaining more teaching and playing materials in the future.

The government itself started providing preschool education at its primary schools. The government ordered every primary school to have a preschool center. In addition, the government made use of satellite preschool stations and child-to-child learning. Second, there was a growing strong coordination at different levels of local administrations (*kebele, wereda, and zone*). For preschool teachers in both government and non-government centers, though the trainings were very limited in the case of teachers from non-government centers. Finally, the government provided monitoring and evaluation service to all centers including non-government centers.

Discussion

Aspects of Preschool Education

In government centers children aged 4 to 6 are accepted for preschool. But in non-government centers, children aged 3 were also accepted. similar with this finding Girma (2014) reported that in 2015/6 out of the estimated 6.76 million children of the appropriate age group 4-6, only about 263,464 children have been reported to have access to pre-primary education in 2,740 kindergarten sites all over the country, which somehow improved the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) from 3.1 to 3.9 percent.

Though the pre-primary education curriculum in Ethiopia has two levels of classification of children aged 4 to 5 and the second stage includes children aged 5 to 6 (MoE, 2010a), in the study areas, preschool education was expected to be divided into three levels based on age. In non-government centers this three-level grouping was practiced but in government centers which usually had two classes. In non-government centers the three levels were: Nursery (3/4 years old), Lower Kindergarten/LKG (5 years old), and Upper Kindergarten/UKG (6 years old). In most government centers, children aged four and five were merged mainly because of lack of resources and teachers. In terms of facility and resources, it has been found that private centers are better than government centers. In line with this finding, other study conducted in other parts of Ethiopia found the same. For instance, Girma (2014) found that the situation in the private centers seemed appealing compared to the government ones in terms of facilities. The situation in these centers seemed appealing in terms of safety and hygienic conditions. Much more, the popular view in the society favors the private centers. It is true that the government centers particularly the newly emerged zero-grades are working under impoverished environments (Girma, 2014).

In government centers, there was no fee to attend preschool education and most students in such schools were largely from families with low economic background; however, parents made their own contribution to the

centers both in cash and in kind. In non-government centers, families were required to pay monthly fee which could range from averagely government 200 Birr (\$ 6.66) and private 400 Birr (\$ 13.33). This shows that most students in non-government centers were from families that had stronger economic background.

The major service provided by all preschool centers is teaching – learning, play and sing songs as instruments. This is consistent with what the preschool curriculum of the country. According to Ministry of Education Ethiopia, the major learning approach used in Ethiopian pre-primary education should be child-centered approach that emphasizes free play, ethics and hygiene (2010a). A study conducted in Addis Ababa by Rahel (2014) found the same, She found that play is the central part of the teaching learning process. The consistently mentioned teaching methods the teacher apply include, play, sing songs, stories, role play, exploring senses and question and answer. Moreover, teachers refer to the teacher's guide and syllabus for more improved teaching method. Teachers usually prepare teaching materials from the surrounding. This has greatly helped them to make the teaching process enjoyable for the children (Rahel, 2014).

As a result, both free play in family settings and planned play in preschools have been encouraged by parents and educators keen to promote all aspects of children's development: like physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. Every type of play, from infant peekaboo and catching games to older children's sports and board games, can be seen to contribute to the growing child's skills and competencies (Bruner *et al.*, 1976; Göncü & Gaskins, 2007).

In all centers children learned five days per week, excepting weekend, holidays and the summer. This is consistent with the recommendation of the preschool curriculum that recommends a learning period of five days per week (MoE, 2010a). However, the amount of time children spent in schools per day varied in different school types. Children in government centers mostly spent around three hours per day in schools, from 2:30 local time until 5:30 local time. In all non-government centers, children spent around seven/eight hours in school, from 2:30 – 9:30 local time. In all centers, children attend few short classes (less than 30 minute per class) and have several break times. This 30 minute allotted per class is also in accordance with the recommendation of the preschool curriculum (MoE, 2010a).

The courses children were taught were basic reading and writing in the medium of instruction, basic math, basic science/environment, and ethics. In addition, all schools also attempted to teach the English language. All preschool centers did not have other professionals (psychologists, nurses, social workers) in their centers.

All government and non-government preschool centers had/used curriculum that was prepared by the government. The pre-primary education curriculum for Amhara region has prepared in Amharic language. According to MoE (2010a), the pre-primary education curriculum in Ethiopia has two stages. The first stage includes children aged four to five and the second stage includes children aged five to six. Pre-primary education in Ethiopia aims to bring about all-round development of children, which involve cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects. It also aims to make children enthusiastic about learning in both formal and informal environments (MoE, 2010a).

The major learning approach underscored in Ethiopian pre-primary curriculum is play-centered approach that emphasizes free play. This approach recognizes that each child is unique and has different needs as well as learning pace. There are also specific approaches that help to achieve the above-mentioned aims. Include free play, sports, dance, visual arts, music and role play; using mother tongue as a medium of instruction; (MoE, 2010a).

In consistent with this finding a study conducted by Rahel G. (2014) explained the importance of the concepts (Physical Health and Development, Social and Emotional Development, Language Development and Cognitive Development) the curriculum is constructed on. The curriculum should encompass every aspect of the child's development, such as knowing their environment, discovering their senses and cognitive growth. Similarly, other study conducted by Tata (2004) in Kenya found that through community collaboration, attempts have been made to ensure a child centered curriculum that is developmentally appropriate.

In the case of teacher – student ratio, variation was observed in government and non-government centers, based on the results. Most government centers claimed that they had fewer teachers in relation to their student size. To the contrary, non-government centers reported that they had enough teachers with regard to their student population. However, a study in other countries stressed that there must be one appropriately licensed and endorsed teacher for 10 students, with an early childhood paraprofessional for any additional students over 10 students, and no more than 18 total students in a classroom with two adults (Morrison, Storey, & Zhang, 2011). Participants were asserted that preschool teachers should be females because females have maternal instinct, consistent with this study; Rahel T. (2014) found that the majority of the respondents were female teachers.

Benefits of Pre-primary Education

Pre-primary education has so many advantages and benefits like, Academic benefit seen mainly in terms of enabling children to read, write, speak, understand, do basic math, and know about the environment. In addition, the positive contribution of preschool education for the quality of regular programs such as primary, secondary,

and tertiary education, was underscored as preschool education could expose children to formal education and put strong foundation for future education. The immediate impact of preschool education on children's later school performance was clearly seen at grade one, when preschool children were compared with other children who did not get preschool education. In relation to this, it was reported that preschool education helped in terms of contributing to solve primary school children's reading problems; reducing dropout rates in the regular programs; and improving students' performance. In supporting this finding Harvey et.al. (2005) asserted that children who have got quality early childhood care and education can perform higher scores on math and reading tests, greater language abilities. It also has less grade retention, less need for special education and remedial work in elementary schools as well as lower rates of child abuse and neglect. The implication is that early childhood care and education assist children to be well prepared for elementary school.

Social-behavioral benefits were manifested in relation to pre-primary education helped children to improve their behavior and develop their social skills. In this case preschool education benefit children in terms of making happy; listen to others; have a better discipline; learn how to respect others; greet people; to say thank you; develop self-awareness, and helping children develop confidence. Children's development, in turn, affects not only their personal well-being but also their capacity to contribute to the well-being of society in general (Mac-Ewan, 2013).

Challenges of Preschool Education

Challenges are infrastructure and resources related problems, parents related problems, teachers related problems, children or students-related problems, and government side problems. All of the above problems/themes were present in both types of centers, but the difference was in the extent of the severity of the problems in different types of centers, i.e., non-government and government centers. Here it is important to note that there was no visible pattern of difference among different towns. The difference in the severity of problems was seen especially in the case of three themes – infrastructure and resources related problems, teachers-related problems and patents-related problems.

Infrastructure and resources related problems are the most frequently mentioned problems and include specific problems such as: lack of space and classrooms (narrow class rooms, lack of playing space, absence of attractive area for children, absence of dining rooms/areas, un-separated preschool and regular programs, problems with rented houses/rooms - this prevented some centers from accepting more students and others to merge classes with different age groups; problem with toilet (in some schools separate toilets were not provided for preschool children); problem with water supply (one government center did not have water, lack of books (absence of books for children especially in government centers, lack of books for preschool to purchase in the study towns and in the country); Shortage of human resource (shortage of teachers, absence of assistant teachers in government centers, low salary for teachers in government and non-government centers, lack/absence of proper desks for children in some centers, lack/absence of indoor and outdoor playing materials (especially in non-government centers it is a serious problem); and difficult physical environments inside and outside of the center (dusty or muddy areas).

In line with the shortage of adequate capital investment to be invested on pre-school development, a study conducted in Kenya by Tata (2004) indicated that poverty and the decline of Kenyan agriculture have resulted in widespread rural to urban migration. This phenomenon has resulted in what Kilbride (1990) describe as dislocation. These regional disparities and their attendant consequences-the lack of, or poor quality of, educational experiences for children living in the same country reflect a similar situation in the United States, as is poignantly articulated by Kozol (1991).

Parents-related problems are the second most frequently mentioned problem (with that of teachers' related problems). parents' lack of awareness (about their roles, about importance of education, refusing to send children to school); hard-to-contact-parents (some were too busy, some were not there but maids); low parent participation (some parents want to be paid to attend meetings, some do not come even if they are called by the school - poverty of parents, working for the whole day could be the reason); parents moving to another area making children drop out of school; and some parents did not bring and take their children on time. In contradiction with this finding, a study by Rahel G. (2014) reported that parents are concerned and actively involving in their kids' provision of education and sometimes assess the care given to their children. The majority of parents are happy with care given to their children, especially by the teachers. However, some are not happy with the way the children are handled and the cleanliness of the preschool. Some still the need for the preschool to consistently communicate with parent concerning their children (Rahel G., 2014).

Teacher-related problems, also the second most frequently mentioned issue (with that of parents related problems), like absence of trained teachers in Early child hood education in the study areas; lack of training for teachers in both types of centers; the situation is similar with other parts of Ethiopia. For instance a study conducted in Addis Ababa showed that the training given for teachers are not adequate enough for effective teaching in pre-school level (Rahel G., 2014). Teachers reported that, even though the one year training can be

labeled as adequate, it can only be said enough as it practiced in the actual world. Clearly, the training should be supported by regular refresher and experience sharing exposures (Rahel G., 2014; Girma, 2014).

Children or students-related problems are the third most frequently mentioned issue (together with the theme government side problems). This theme is in relation to children who were difficult to handle; children getting sick and getting involved in accidents could happen when playing (owners of centers were required to pay a lot of money); children or kids fighting in class; children missing classes in case of family problems, ceremonies. This signals that discipline policies has to be implemented effectively by pre-primary school administrators. This is due to the fact that early childhood discipline policies enable early childhood programs to build an infrastructure that promotes a social climate conducive to learning and academic success, as well as assist early childhood professionals in identifying valued outcomes and priorities for supporting children's social competence (Longstreth, Brady, & Kay, 2013).

Government side problems are about specific issues such as: lack of support for non-government centers from the local (city and zone) preschool bureaus (in terms of training, further education opportunities, provision of resources like books – requiring payments for such services); lack of incentive from other government bureaus (to get loan, tax breaks, etc., to expand); and financial problems to build government the centers (lack of budget and problem in terms of releasing and using allocated budget for preschool education).

Opportunities for Preschool Education

In relation to opportunities or conducive environments; recent strong government emphasis on preschool education, increase teachers' and determination willingness to work, communities and parents growing interest in preschool education, priorities given to preschool needs, increasing number of students, and possibility of attaining more teaching and playing materials in the future.

A strong government emphasis on preschool or preprimary education is the most important and most frequently mentioned theme in this study. This theme could be seen in terms of the following recent developments from the side of the government. First, the government itself started providing preschool education at its primary schools. The government ordered every primary school in the region to have a preschool center. In addition, the government made use of satellite preschool stations and child-to-child learning schemes. Second, there was a growing strong coordination at different levels of local administrations (*kebele, wereda, and zone*). This coordination was in terms of mobilization of resources and people- rising or creating communities' awareness, identification of preschool children, registration of preschool children, and finding best places and class rooms for preschool children inside schools. Third, the government provided training opportunities for preschool teachers in both government and non-government centers, though the trainings were very limited in the case of teachers from non-government centers. Finally, the government (local preschool education bureaus) provided monitoring and evaluation service to all centers including non-government centers. In agreement with these findings Rahel G. (2014) and Rahel T. (2014) reported that the government should be able to fulfill all the required support such as material, manpower and technical support. There should be continuous and regular consultation between the government and teachers and administrative staff for better improvement of the teaching learning process. In-service training, increment of salary and increase salary are among the major request by the teachers. However, studies from other countries showed that non-government/private centers are not always better in preschool quality than government/public centers, Hardin et al (2015).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study highlighted challenges and opportunities of government and non-government pre-primary education centers in study areas. In the case of program types, contrasting results were common especially regarding aspects of preschool education. In this study non-government centers were found to be much better than their government counterparts. These differences can be best explained in relation to the lack/presence of resource and the level of attention given to preprimary education in different program types.

To improve the quality of pre-primary education efforts should be made to alleviate the challenge mentioned problems and to strengthen the above-mentioned opportunities and conducive environments.

In addition the following sets of recommendations could be made for different stakeholders such as the government and its education bureaus (they should work on issues of more budget, expending centers, feeding programs, playing materials, support and supervision to non-government centers), community service activities such as providing training, launching formal education in preprimary education, donating materials and equipment. preschool centers (they should work on issues of separating preschool from the regular, fewer children per class, playing spaces and materials), parents (they should work on the issue of active participation), more over in addition to this, more cooperation among various stakeholders should be emphasized.

Recommendations

Based on this study, the researcher would like to suggest the following possible recommendation.

- All preschool programs must implement a comprehensive, evidence-based preschool curriculum in order to meet the preschool standards.
- Developmentally appropriate teaching practices must be implemented in all preschool programs so as to scaffold successful achievement of the preschool standards. Such practice is based on knowledge about how children learn and develop, how children vary in their development, and how best to support children's learning and development.
- Preschool educational experiences must be intended to stimulate, assist, support, and sustain emergent skills.
- Preschools aim to offer experiences that maximize young children's learning and development, providing each child with a foundation for current and future school success.
- The preschool education program should have well planned curriculum and text books of its own. Such curriculum should also be supported by various pre-education references and teacher guides that fits the children's mental and psychological readiness.
- It is also advisable to make the classroom conducive for children's health and safety. It needs to have sufficient spaces, and well ventilated rooms;
- It is also advisable to make the physical environment appropriate for the children's needs and ages. There should be sufficient and green places to play and breath a fresh air from around.
- Non –government centers should concentrate quality education rather gathering money.
- There must be coordinated and integrated activities among the different social and governmental sectors including education and health to create full-fledged pre-school education systems.
- Government sectors and other nongovernmental donations need to encourage and support the attempts of the rural Weredas with some early childcare and education facilities and equipment.
- There is a need to raise awareness to the rural parents and communities about the early childcare and education benefits. Such awareness strategies may be linked with the family education that includes caring and rearing practices of a child, the process of child feeding systems and the how of keeping personal hygiene and sanitations.

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