

An Investigation of Play-Based Instruction Practice and Challenges in Hawassa College of Teacher Education

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Abstract

It is obviously known that young children learn best through play-based, community-based and project-based approaches to learning. Play is an every thing for children through which they experience the world. A child playing is practicing minds-on, hearts-on and hands-on activities. This study was aimed at the exploration of play-based instruction at Hawassa College of Teacher Education in Ethiopia. It followed a qualitative research design; phenomenological approach in which reality is viewed in constructivist o/interpretivist paradigm. Total participants of the study were 8 involving 2 teacher educators and 6 prospective teachers from early childhood care and education department. All participants were selected purposively. Document analysis, FDG and interview were the main data gathering tools. Data was analyzed thematically through transcription of interviews and FGDs in to meaningful statements. Findings of the study reveal that play-based instruction implementation in the study area is poor. TLM developed for the program was not suitable for it. Teacher educators' perception about the practice is not constructive. Trainees are trained in a very similar way to primary school trainees. Therefore; the researcher strongly suggests that early childhood teacher training needs to be revised so as to incorporate play-based pedagogy. Again, teacher educators require trainings. Lastly, colleges of teacher education should establish playgrounds, resource rooms and model ECCE classes so as to promote the training program.

Key Terms: - Play, Pedagogy, Early Childhood, Education, Teacher Training

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

According to Ginsburg, K. R. (2007), Early childhood education is a program that promotes young children's holistic development through creative play, social interaction, natural expression, and other important skills with an academic foundation for primary education. In class, children learn alphabet, numbers and colors, study their bodies, their families, and their communities, listen to stories and read aloud, make art projects, participate dramatic productions and learn about holidays, plants, and animals. It strives to offer children a foundation for the development of social skills, self-confidence, motivation and cognition.

Theorists such as Montessori, Vygotsky, Froebel, and Rousseau have developed philosophies about early childhood care and education. Their thoughts are explored and utilized in classrooms today and impact the philosophies of many early childhood educators. Preschool is about "...children who 'wonder if...' imagine, create, fail, discover, manage conflict, solve problems, try, persevere, help, succeed and love the freedom to lead and learn through play" (Dinger, 2014).

As stated in Sjoerdsma, S. (2016), scholars suggest several learning approaches in early childhood education. One of the them is teacher oriented that tries to teach specific skills directly to the children. The other one is play-based instruction in which children learn skills through self-directed hands-on activities. Popular theorist Maria Montessori suggests that young children can learn best through their own practical activities. Also, Froebel established kindergarten more than 150 years ago, and play was a big focus, though it was not free. Play-based instruction is a child-centered instruction (children are fully engaged in the learning activity).

Play-based instruction got a special emphasis among different preschools. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states, "Children have the right to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities" (UNICEF, 2013). This shows children learn best though play that they like to play naturally. Teaching children by using play-based instruction is all about fulfilling young children's natural interests. This article stresses any activities for young children should fit and be based on the child's best interests. It also reminds even parents of young children to allow their children to play.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

As stated in MoE (2016), the government of Ethiopia believes that play-based learning has significant contribution on children's school readiness including academic competencies, social-emotional development, and physical development. The aim of the play-based instruction is to promote a sense of wonder, exploration,

investigation and interest in a rich range of materials, resources and opportunities in which the child can engage. Now days, preschools are required to implement play-based instruction.

Following the establishment of government early childhood care and education centers, Colleges of Teacher Education were forced to open Preschool Diploma program around 2014 G.C. As a result of this, a lot of preschool teachers were graduated after the completion of three years training in the last six years. Different studies were conducted to see the implementation of preschool program in Ethiopia, there is no clearly known evidence with regard to the implementation of play-based instruction among early childhood education teacher training programs. It is very important to see such trends in Hawassa College of Teacher Education because it has a long-time experience in teacher training in the country.

Therefore; with the growing demand of early childhood care and education program in terms of recognizing the extent of play-based instruction, this study is going to be conducted to see the insight of the implementation of play-based instruction in the study site mentioned earlier. This study was to explore the existing practices and challenges of the implementation of play-based instruction in the college. It also attempted to evaluate the extent how early childhood care and education teacher training policy documents incorporate play-based instruction.

Based on the problem statement discussed above, this study was intended to answer the following research questions. These are:

1. What is the current practice of play-based instruction in Hawassa College of Teacher Education?
2. How do early childhood education prospective teachers perceive play-based learning?
3. How do early childhood care and education teacher educators understand play-based learning experiences?
4. What are the factors affecting the implementation of play-based pedagogy in the study area?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

This study has both general and specific objectives. Both of them are discussed below.

Specifically, this study is intended to:

1. identify the state of play-based instruction practice of Hawassa College of Teacher Education.
2. explore the early childhood education prospective teachers' and teacher educators' perception about play-based instruction.
3. discuss factors hindering proper implementation of play-based instruction in the study area.
4. suggest direction about the practice for policy makers, planners and decision makers.

1.4. Significance of the study

In general, this study has the following significance:

- It may provide information to Sidama National Regional State Education Bureau and concerned bodies on the level of implementation of play-based instruction.
- It may provide information and policy directions with regard to play-based instruction for planners, policy and decision makers and curriculum material developers at Regional and national level of the education system.
- It also mobilizes all responsible bodies in the region to bring significant change in implementation of play-based instruction.

Chapter Two

Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Early Childhood Education Teacher Training

The 1994 Education and Training policy gives due consideration to teacher education program for the purpose that, teacher education institutes have the potential to take changes in the society by creating individuals and society who can make active participation in the development process by acquiring knowledge, ability, skills and Attitudes (MoE, 2003).

Thus, teacher education institutions are anticipated to equip student-teachers who are entirely appropriate to the needs of today's classroom and who have knowledge of subject matter as well as pedagogical skills. Since, it is in the classroom that real learning takes place, qualified and committed teachers are fundamentally required (MoE, 2005). Thus, teacher training program is viewed as pertinent to enhance the capabilities of teachers and produce competent and committed school teachers. Preschool teacher education is also considered in the policy framework recently.

2.2. Play-Based Instruction

As stated in Hughes F. (1999), here are several teaching approaches in early childhood care and education. One of the approaches is teacher-centered in which children imitate everything from their teachers. Although teacher-directed instruction can be a useful teaching approach, it is no longer considered appropriate to use only this

approach in a preschool setting. Children should experience many ways of learning.

Play-based instruction is very similar to student-centered instruction. Nevertheless, it is explicitly geared towards the preschool and has an emphasis on play. Through play, children create, adapt, explore, experiment, learn, communicate, socialize, and solve problem. Play allows children to build and extend their knowledge and skills as they interact with their environment, with others, and on their own (Glover, 1999).

2.3. Historical Development of Play-Based Instruction

Play-based instruction is highly associated with creative curriculum. It has a history exactly equal with the history of early childhood care and education. When Froebel found kindergarten education, his assumption was that children should touch, sense, explore and investigate their environment. This statement assures that children in early childhood care and education program are expected to attend for play activities based on their interest. The name kindergarten equivalents kids' garden which means children are busy as they are doing their practical activities as indicated in Sjoerdsma, S., 2016.

Child-centered approaches to teaching were advocated already in the seventeenth century. The most leading philosopher in early childhood care and education Dr. Maria Montessori in her program discussed and suggested that young children come to preschools for the sake of hands-on activities. Teachers in this program are activators so as to initiate children learn through their own practices. Even learning environment is also significantly different from primary grade levels that it facilitates corner organization. Contents here are integrated and children learn just by finding and acting their interests. Each child can go through all corners such as science corner, mathematics corner, art and culture corner as well as language corner (Dereje D. 2018).

The launching of early childhood care and education program initiated the emergence of play-based learning in Ethiopia too. Early childhood care and education among government schools in Ethiopia has a very short history. Current studies believe that every pre-primary issue was totally given for private sector in the past. There was no as such valuable struggle to promote the expansion of early childhood care and education until the emergence of O class program in 2011. This shows there is little historical evidence with regard to the capability of government owned preschools to run play-based instruction in the past (MoE, 2018).

However, access to early childhood care and education is being achieved now days. Strong commitment was made to develop policy frameworks, curriculum and related resources to enhance the program. In light of the international trends, Ethiopian preschools are assumed to implement play-based instruction. Therefore, the above argument indicates play-based instruction in Ethiopia is believed to emerge in the last few years. This is true for the region in which this study was conducted.

2.4. Importance of Play-Based Instruction

Play-based learning which involves hands-on activities is the principal practice in early childhood classrooms because it is the most appropriate way young children learn and provides opportunities for young children to grow academically and socially. Play allows children to learn and practice conflict resolution as they interact with peers learning to work cooperatively on common tasks. Play in the classroom fosters improvements in subjects like maths, early literacy, and social-emotional of children both low- and higher-income environments (Lynch, 2015).

Play is a way how children are engaged in their learning. Children learn in a natural setting in which every activity is managed by children themselves. It is believed that there is no activity which can replace play and an importance it gives. Children live play, learn it, develop through it and build interpersonal relationship as much as their capacity. Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning. They have to play with what they know to be true in order to find out more, and then they can use what they learn in new forms of play. It is becoming clear through research on the brain that childhood needs play. Play acts as a forward feed mechanism into courageous, creative, rigorous thinking in adulthood as stated in Fromberg, D. P. 2002.

Play is the lens through which children experience their world and the world of others. It is important for children's development and for children to bond with one another. It offers a chance to connect with one another. Play helps children learn the rules of their family and what is expected from them. As children grow, play helps them learn how to act in society. Play is not a trivial matter. At the very least, it seems to serve important developmental purposes. Childhood researchers agree that naturally occurring play is important for physical and motor development, social and emotional development, and even intellectual development (Hughes, F. 1999).

2.5. Factors that can affect the Implementation of Play-Based Instruction

Recent studies reveal that play-based instruction is facing ample challenges now days. Preschools face a lot of barriers such as lack of skilled man power, poor learning environment, and inability to adapt early childhood care and education curriculum models and the like. As a result of this, children are forced to imitate from their teachers in most of the preschool settings.

According to Azzi-Lessing (2009), in education, infrastructure provides bases for the rest. Once the

deficiencies related to infrastructure occur, this may trigger other problems as well. One of the sources problems relating to play-based instruction implementation is facilities available in the school. According to the study, in-service trainings that school administrators organized is not enough to abreast pre-school teachers with the current trend of the early childhood curriculum. According to the study, it was revealed that the type of in-service training pre-school teachers receive is not from the field of early childhood education. Thus, the in-service training that teachers participated might not be supportive for them in finding answers for their questions on curriculum implementation.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The main purpose of this research is to explore the practice of play-based instruction in Hawassa College of Teacher Education, Sidama Region. In order to accomplish this study, the researcher used a qualitative research design. Specifically, phenomenological approach was used to realize the practice and implementation. For qualitative analysis, the researcher applied narration and transcription methods.

3.2. Study Area

This study was conducted in Hawassa College of Teacher Education, Sidama Region. The study addressed the implementation of play-based instruction in early childhood care and education teacher training. This site of study was selected purposively because of the researcher's prior experience.

3.3. Research Participants and Selection Criteria

The core participants of this research were early childhood care and education prospective teachers, officers, ECCE teacher educators and program administrators. The criteria to select these participants was educational background, field of specialization, position and the level of information they provide about the current implementation of play-based instruction in Hawassa College of Teacher Education. Participants rich in information are those from which the researcher can earn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of this study. Officers especially early childhood care and education focal person or department head was also involved in the study.

Because the intention of this study was to explore practice, the researcher applied a qualitative research method particularly phenomenological approach. Accordingly, the total number of participants in this research were 9 individuals. From the total of 4 teacher educators, 2 of them were purposively selected. Among 54 ECCE prospective teachers, 6 of them were selected using referral chain sampling technique. Additionally, one officer from College administrators was intentionally involved in the study.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

The researcher used document analysis, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion to gather data. Individual interview was held with the officer and teacher educators. Early childhood education prospective teachers were collected together and asked to discuss. Questions during the interview sessions were all open-ended. Interview guide was prepared in local language and used for both individual and group interview. To assess the practice of play-based instruction, the researcher used a series of questions that lead help to gather relevant information.

3.5. Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation

As this study is qualitative, the researcher tried to analyze and interpret all data thematically. Most of the issues raised during interview were analyzed in to meaningful statements as the respondents provided. All data were interpreted in to words that would be paraphrased from the respondents' perceptual response. All information that were gathered using checklist were discussed in to clear statements.

3.6. Ethical Consideration

The researcher provided letter of consent for all participants included in the study. It would help them to decide whether they take part or not. The researcher used commonly understandable language based on the context of the participants. They were asked to participate voluntarily and told as the researcher never publish their names, personal addresses and any issues and their opinion without their written consent. Even information they provide will be disclosed directly based on their negotiation. Again, the researcher told them the data they provide will not be used for any other purposes and they will be informed about the progress of the study if necessary.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1. Demographic Information

Participants	No.	Sex	Age	Educational Background	Position
Teacher Educators	2	F	30-50	MA in Social Psychology	Dep. Representative
		M	30-50	MA in ECCE	Lecturer
Trainees	6	M/F	19-26	3 rd Year ECCE Trainees	ECCE Trainees

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information

As it is indicated in the table above, participants were intentionally selected because of the professional exposure they have in order to give relevant information about the phenomenon. The sample involves all the concerned individuals that involves trainees, lecturers and officer. Among 54 trainees, 2 males and 4 females, totally 6 of them were involved in the study. All of them were 3rd year preschool prospective teachers. The 2 teacher educators selected for the study were MA holders in ECCE and Social Psychology respectively.

4.2. Data from Document Analysis

S/N	Main Target	Existence	
		Yes	No
1.	Methodology Suggestion		
	a. Play is deliberately suggested as a method of teaching.	x	
	b. There are some artistic activities suggested as a pedagogy.	x	
	c. Songs, and storytelling are suggested as teaching method.	x	
2.	Content Relevance		
	a. Contents are relevant to teach using play.	x	
	b. "Play as how to teach" is indicated under each content.	x	
3.	Play Guideline		
	a. Informs the activities of both trainees and tutors.		x
	b. There are instructions clearly stated for each activity.	x	
	c. Language of instruction is clear and understandable.		x
4.	Sequentiality and Appropriateness		
	a. Suggests a child-friendly learning environment and materials.		x
	b. Allows trainees practice child-centered pedagogy.		x
	c. All activities are different from the primary school setting.		x
	d. All of the classroom activities are sequentially arranged.		x

Table 2: Questions used to Analyze ECCE Methodology Courses

From the table above, one can understand that two of the methodology courses namely Teaching Mother Tongue in Preschool (TMTPS – 301) and Teaching Math in Preschool (TMPS -301) were evaluated using the rubrics stated in the table. Both of them are a 3 credit hour courses each. The documents were critically analyzed based on the four basic issues. One of the considerations was the methodology suggestion. The others were: content relevance, play guideline presentation and sequence and appropriateness.

In both courses, play is somehow intentionally suggested as a method of teaching. In some parts, teacher educators are required to ask prospective teachers about the lists of the appropriate teaching methods in preschool education. However, there is nothing stated in detail than listing the methods under each content of the learning. Especially in Math course, most of the activities are counting and naming numbers from 0-20, teaching the size of objects, locating objects, teaching time and place as well as teaching spatial understanding. Play and other child-centered approaches to learning are written in front of each concepts though there is no activity that guides how teacher educators use it as a method of teaching. In almost all lessons, showing pictures is suggested as the only method to teach Mathematical concepts for young children.

Some of the artistic activities like drama, drawing, coloring and painting are listed under each chapter in both courses. However, still teacher educators are required to ask trainees to indicate letters and numbers from the picture already developed. There is no room for trainees to practice an independent and group painting, drawing, and dancing. In language course, group discussion and questioning and answering and explanation are commonly used methods of teaching.

Storytelling is not well suggested in the course, 'Teaching Mother Tongue in Preschool'. Regarding content relevance, most topics stated in the courses are very suitable areas to practice play-based instruction. For each lesson, play is mentioned simply as a method of teaching where as there is no way that can force instructors use various kinds of play. The modules lack guidelines that direct how play works. There are no activities that require preparation of child friendly learning setup. It does not allow trainees practice child-centered pedagogy and therefore; it seems almost all activities are organized in a way other grades are prepared.

4.3. Data from the Interview and Focus Group Discussion

4.3.1. Child Learning Approaches Widely Used by the Teacher Educators

During the focus group discussion held with them, preschool prospective teachers were asked about the child learning approaches most frequently applicable by their instructors. Their responses in the local language (Sidaamu Afoo) are transcribed in to English as follows.

Student-discussant 1:

“Baalunku rosiisaanonke dhaaddotenni rosiisate hayyo horonsidhannoreeti. Gayite rosiissannonkehu: kulatenni, leellishatenni, xa’matenninna kulatenniiti. Ikkirono, mite mite xa adhinanni hee’noommo rosiisate hayyo korsuwa yannara rosiisaanonke godo’lete uduunne qixxeessineemmo gede xa’mitannonke. Sa’ne sa’ne kayinni, wo’naalshu assootuwano qixxeessate gadachammeemmo.”

Statements above reflect the SD1’s idea. He during the focus group discussion said that almost all of their instructors use direct teaching methods such as telling, asking, showing and lecturing. However, there are lists of child-centered approach to learning in the methodology courses they are taking right now. Their instructors ask them to develop play materials and activities associated to it. All group members shared this idea.

Student-discussant 2:

“Ani ledeemmahu, techo barri geeshsha wolootu qajeelaanowichinni baxxino garinni ronsoommo rosi dino. Sase rosinke goli rosiisaano agurranna gattinori baalu wolu golinni dagge rosiissannonkereeti. Roso godo’letenni shiqisha didandiitannoreeti.”

Supporting the previous idea, SD2 during the discussion added that preschool teacher training is not far different from the training that primary education prospective teachers take. The discussant informed that teacher educators for this program are of various specializations except three instructors from the early childhood care and education background. She added that teacher educators from other departments are not able to practice play-based instruction. All of the focus group discussion members discussed on the issue clearly and reached to the agreement.

During the interview session made with the teacher educators, interviewee 1 disclosed that most of the instructors teach both preschool and primary education prospective teachers. She added that teacher educators who are assigned to instruct early childhood education prospective teachers do not use different approach to child learning than lecturing. According to her response, the most commonly applicable pedagogy in early childhood education teacher training is lecturing.

4.3.2. Activities Carried out by Trainees During Methodology Courses

Trainees were also requested to discuss about the activities they perform during methodology course lesson. Then,

Student-discussant 3:

“Duucha yannara rosiisaanonke annu annu woy gaamotenni ikkinanni loonseemmore kultannonke. Hakkiinni saeenna, qaaquulle godoshshiishatenni, faarsiisatenni, misile kayissannonna buursiisatenni rosiisa dandiinanni gede huwachishshannonke. Lawishshaho: fidallanna kiiri qaaquullu gede ikkine ka’ne kiirreemmo gede jawaachishshannonke. Ninkeno yanna baala konne assineemmo.”

From the statements above, one can understand that ECCE teacher educators in Hawassa College of Teacher Education teach trainees how to read letters and numbers loud, how to count letters and numbers, how to draw picture and color it very frequently. The discussant strongly discussed that their teacher educators assigns them to do both individual and group activities that are associated with the letters and numbers they are learning. The rest six participants from the focus group discussion agreed with the previous respondent and claim that their teacher educators help them to engage in the practical learning activities like singing, drawing, painting, cutting and pasting as well as free conversation.

Teacher educators were also asked to discuss about the activities they provide for the ECCE prospective teachers during methodology course delivery. Respondent 2 told that course modules direct them what and how to give for the trainees. He added that based on the information stated in the teaching-learning materials, they tell the trainees to produce practical materials like pictures, objects from clay and paintings. The respondent argued that different child learning approaches are indicated across the modules though there is no clear information about the play procedures.

4.3.3. Teacher Educators’ Support to Play-Based Learning

During group interview, early childhood education prospective teachers were asked about the support they get from their instructors. Their responses were:

Student-discussant S3:

“Baalanti rosiisaanonke danchu garinniiti rosiissannonkehu. Qaaquullu gede ikkinanni ronseemmo gede assannonkehu mitto rosiisaancho callaati. Wolootu rosu amado kaima assite odeessatenninna leellishatenni rosiissannonke. Roore wote qaaquullu gede ikkinammora

xa'mitannonkehu rosiisi'rate fulleemmo yannaraati.”

Discussant S3 in the above responses argued that almost all instructors are supportive. She confirmed that only one instructor always encourages them to learn through play. Other teachers use telling, showing and discussion as a main teaching method. Even though methodology courses require hands-on activities, most of the lessons are delivered through a common teaching approach. We may be forced to play like children during the practicum session only.

Similarly, teacher educators were interviewed on what extent do they provide play-based learning activities. The responses of one interviewee reveals that they use a traditional way of teaching. He uncovered that they plan to integrate play and other child-centered approaches to learning in most cases. However, the un conducive learning environment, prospective teachers' lack of interest and absence of learning materials always make them use lecture method. Another interviewee also discussed that almost all teacher educators are not providing play-based experiences for their trainees. The assignment provision is like any other training modalities and the only thing teacher educators do is informing trainees to use play in their future profession.

4.3.4. Child Pedagogy Awareness

During the FGD session, preschool prospective teachers tried to discuss on the difference between child-pedagogy and teaching in primary schools. Here below are their responses.

Student-discussant S2:

“Uyinooninke qajeelshi kaiminni, balaxote rosi wolu rosu daninni baxxannohu sasu qaru coyinniiti. Umikkihu, rosu amado ikkana layinkihu kayinni rosiinsanni qarqaranna uduunneeti. Sayikki badooshshi, rosiisate hayyootinna keenote amanyooteeti. Wona roduuwi'ya kayissuti rosiisate hayyubba umikki dirimira horonsi'nannireeti. Balaxote rosira ikkitanno yinanniti kayinni godo'lete, faarsote, maattotenna woloota wo'naalshu assootuwaati.”

Statements above reflect that the key informant clearly stated about the training they took besides to their regular courses. According to the information she mentioned, the main difference between primary and preschool education can be perceived in terms of three major components. She added that these three components are: the curriculum content, learning environment and play materials. The last but not the least is the child-centered pedagogy in which all children enjoy learning through practical activities. Finally, all group members accepted the idea very positively.

Student-discussant S6:

“Chayild pilay (CPL-231) yinanni korse adhinummo yannara qaaquulle rosiinsanni hayyubba faarso, maatto, hasaawa, angate ogimma, godo'lenna woloota ikkana hala'ladunni ronsoommo. Ikkollana, rosiisaanonke asse yite kultannonke ikkinnina hiittoonni rosiinseemmo dixawissannonke. Godo'letenni rosiinsiro qaaquullu amado hegersitannota anfoommo. Togo yaa, qaaquullu roso shiqinshanni hayyo umikki dirimi rosi shiqanno doogganni baxxannoti xawoho.”

According to the above discussant, trainees are informed about the approaches to child learning in the course, “Child Play and Learning (CPL-231)”. They recognize young children learn best through play, song, conversation, art and independent activities. She added that instructors are not clear about the child-learning approach. They are sure that approach to preschool teaching is quite different from the primary schooling.

Teacher educators for the above question answered that;

Interviewee 1:

“I know play-based instruction refers to the approaches to child learning in early childhood care and education settings. Some of them are play including indoor and outdoor, art like drawing, painting, cutting and pasting, songs and storytelling. The problem with me is not knowing them very well, but inability to use them frequently.”

Interviewee 2:

“We teachers have no understanding gap with regard to the concept and types of play-based instruction. Children have an inner potential to entertain, learn and explore through play activities. I believe that ECCE prospective teachers are required to learn as they could be able to practice play-based instruction. Yet, we are not delivering training as it encourages trainees practice play-based instruction.”

Statements above divulge that early childhood care and education teacher educators are fully knowledgeable about the concept of play-based instruction. However, they are not able to practice it frequently. Teachers from other departments who share preschool courses still require special trainings that make them able to exercise play-based instruction.

4.3.5. Teaching Material Relevance to Play-Based Instruction

Teacher educators were interviewed about this issue. Prospective teachers were also asked to discuss on it. Their responses are transcribed as follows.

Student-discussant S4:

“Duucha ronseemmo korsuwa wolootu qajeelaano adhitannotewichinni jawa badooshshe diafidhinoreeti. Ikkollana, qaaquulleho Shallagonna Dadhote Afoo rosiinsanni gara huwachishshanno korsuwa godole'tenni shiqishate wo'naalloonnireeti. Amadonsa yaano balaxi-niwaawenna balaxi-borro wo'munni wo'ma qaaquulle merrersino garinni shiqinshoonnireeti. Mitte mittenta amado xawadu assootinni qineessine wora hoongirono, lamente korsuwara godole, faarso, maatonna hasaawa rosiisate hayyubba assine horonsi'nanni gede kulloonni.”

SD4 in discussion disclosed that almost all courses they take are similar to that of the other trainees. However, in the courses, “Teaching Mathematics for Preschool–TMPS-301 and Teaching Mother Tongue for Preschool–TMTPS-301” lessons are organized in a way that play can be used as a teaching method. Its contents like emergent literacy and early numeracy are quite relevant to the approaches to child learning. Even though all topics are not stated in a clear activity that supports child-centered learning, all the important approaches are simply listed for each category. Lastly, all partakers were agreed on this idea.

Two teacher educators during in person interview revealed that approach to teaching of the most preschool diploma program courses is not aligned with the nature of the program. They witnessed there are only four courses that match with the idea of play-based learning. The courses are: Child Play and Learning, Teaching Maths, Teaching Mother Tongue and Teaching Environmental Science. One interviewee argued that three of the methodology courses are not taught by the early childhood care and education professionals because they are prepared by the subject specialists. The developers tried to mention some of the child-centered teaching methods though all of the suggested methods are not exemplified and stated in activity form. Another interviewee discussed that even the course, “Child Play and Learning (CPL-231)” is not that much appropriate to be taught using child-centered methodology like play and others.

4.3.6. Challenges in Play-Based Instruction Implementation

Early childhood care and teacher education prospective teachers during the focus group discussion debated on the question related to challenges of play-based instruction. They responded:

Student-discussant S1:

“Roso qaaquullu rossanno garinni ronseemmokki assitino korkaatta duucha ikkitara dandiitanno. Kuri giddo umikkihu, rosiisaanonke rosantino rosiisate hayyo calla horonsi'rate. Duuchu rosiisaanonke yitinota yitanni kultunkekki rosu leellannonkeha dilawannonsa. Korsete mojjulla giddo worroonni rosiisate hayyo umosenni horonsidhe yitannonke ikkinnina insa uminsa horonsidhe dileellishshannonke. Roore konni golinni maassante fultanno qajeelaanono eela loosu darga qaaquulle rosiissenna awuutte affannokki gede assine coyi'nannihu gobbaanni, hiittoonni qajeelturooti rosiisate qarrantara dandiitannohu yine dixa'minanni.”

The above discussant told that there are many factors that contribute to the poor implementation of play-based instruction. He disclosed that one of the factors is teacher educator's tendency to use teacher-centered teaching method. Discussants' voice reflects that most of the teachers present lessons verbally because they do not think trainees understand concepts unless told orally. Teacher educators inform them to use child-centered pedagogy mentioned in the course modules without showing how to use. The discussant added that without considering how they learned during the training, society blame preschool teachers' ability to teach young children.

Interviewee 1:

“As to my understanding, the major challenge in play-based instruction implementation is rigidity of the curriculum itself. Courses you mentioned are expected to include play-based and learner-centered activities. However, contents of the courses are not organized in that way.”

Interviewee 2:

“The other factor that hinders the effectiveness of play-based instruction in our college is teacher educators' tendency to practice the old-fashioned teaching method. Due to the effect of long-term experience, most teacher educators claim they could use learner-centered approach to teaching while using teacher-oriented methods.”

From the statements above, one can easily understand that the curriculum materials used in colleges of teacher education are not relevant to the early childhood care and education program nature. Methodology courses like teaching numeracy, teaching environmental science, and teaching local language involve merely stated play-based approaches to children learning. Child-centered learning approaches such as play, song, story telling and art are simply stated in the teaching-learning materials without activities that best describes the content.

Another challenge in play-based instruction that was mentioned by the second interviewee is instructors' poor commitment to use it. Most of the teacher educators entertain teaching through direct instruction or imparting. They think every knowledge, skill and attitude is gained only from them. Most of the teacher educators do not use play-based instruction not due to lack of awareness and understanding about it but because

of the tendency to employ lecture method.

Interviewee 1 & 2:

“Play-based instruction is not applicable in our college because of the unavailability of learning materials (playground, and equipment or toys). Play requires both indoor and outdoor play settings which are well-adjusted to the age and social context of the young children. Without play materials, play may not go effective. In addition to this, administrative body of our college is not keen to facilitate best learning environment to practice child-centered pedagogy. Few teacher educators struggle to integrate the training with the bottom curriculum. We are also not eager to learn from such commitments. On the other hand, trainees are not motivated to attend play-based lessons.”

Both teacher educators during the independent interview session talked about the importance of the availability of rich learning environment in play-based instruction implementation. According to their argument, Hawassa College of Teacher Education is not well organized in equipment, and play materials. It has no play field that fits to and fulfills the nature of the early childhood care and education teacher training program. As stated by the interviewees department of early childhood care and education presented a plan that was intended to establish KG in the college, resource room, playground, purchase and produce play materials as well as facilitate awareness raising trainings for the community members. Nevertheless, top administrators of the college refused to put it in to practice just forwarding intangible reasons.

Finally, interviewees discussed that there are different practices observable in the college. Some teacher educators strive to integrate teacher training with the child curriculum so as to bring play-based approach to learning realistic. Teacher educators who are not willing to learn from such interesting experiences are many in number. Interviewees disclosed that for teacher educators who follow the right track to practice play-based instruction, trainees’ lack of interest and motivation to attend lesson is the major challenge. They added, most of the prospective teachers confuse play with the HPE (health and physical education) activities.

Chapter Five

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1. Findings

Data gathered from document analysis and through interview and focus group discussion with early childhood care and education prospective teachers and teacher educators reveal that play-based instruction is not properly implemented in Hawassa College of Teacher Education. According to their argument, lecturing and imparting are the mostly used teaching methods in the college. Almost all teacher educators perceive that teaching is all about sharing knowledge, skill and attitude from the respective teacher educator. Prospective teachers involved in this study share the idea that unlike others, teacher educators from early childhood care and education department try to ask them produce learning materials.

Most teacher educators teach both early childhood care and education and primary education prospective teachers very commonly. There is no significant difference in methodology except in content depth and arrangement. Individual and group activities that promote learning numbers, letters, and conversation are widely provided. Three of the methodology courses namely teaching mathematics, teaching local language and teaching environmental science suggest some of the play-based and active teaching methods in the teaching-learning materials.

Only one teacher educator who teaches the course Child Play in Preschool (CPL 231) employs child-centered approaches to learning like play, song, storytelling and art. Though teacher educators from ECCE field of specialization claim they have no understanding gap, those who are assigned from other fields of specialization lack knowledge, skill and attitude of the play-based instruction. Methodology courses are developed in a way they support play-based learning.

Document analysis found that three of the methodology courses are informative and conducive to practice play-based instruction. However, data from the interview and FGD reveal that poor organization of the curriculum, poor teacher educators’ awareness about the program nature, poor prospective teachers’ motivation, lack of conducive and rich in play materials learning environment, teacher educators’ tendency to use old-fashioned teaching method and top administrators’ weak support to the program are the major challenges in the process of play-based instruction implementation.

5.2. Conclusion

One of the conclusions the researcher can draw from the findings of this study is that there is poor implementation of play-based instruction in Hawassa College of Teacher Education. Teaching and learning approached applied in early childhood care and education teacher training and primary education training is more or less similar. In the three methodology courses chosen for the study, best approaches to child learning are stated well. But the problem is that teacher educators who are assigned to teach those courses lack awareness

about the nature of the program as they are from other field of specialization.

Teacher educators from early childhood care and education field of study and training background are employing child-centered pedagogy better than those from other departments. Organization of methodology courses in a way they support child-centered approach is one of the opportunities in early childhood care and education teacher training to implement play-based instruction. This gives teacher educators an opportunity to provide training using self-developed child-friendly learning environment using locally available materials.

Play-based instruction implementation can be affected by poor organization of the curriculum, poor teacher educators' awareness about the program nature, poor prospective teachers' motivation, lack of conducive and rich in play materials learning environment, teacher educators' tendency to use old-fashioned teaching method and top administrators' weak support to the program.

5.3. Recommendations

The researcher of this study suggests the following recommendation for the future improvement of the program.

- ✓ Department of early childhood care and education field of study should create awareness for the teacher educators from other departments who are assigned to teach ECCE prospective teachers.
- ✓ Early childhood care and education teacher training materials require certain modifications so as to incorporate activities that support play-based instruction. To make this reality, MoE should involve ECCE professionals in the process of teacher training materials development, validation and adaptation.
- ✓ Top level administrators of the teacher education colleges need awareness creating trainings in order to support program implementation.
- ✓ ECCE teacher educators should engage themselves in creative activities like preparing play equipment using locally available materials, providing trainees opportunity to practice child curriculum, and the like.
- ✓ Colleges of Teacher Education should establish resource rooms, playgrounds and model KG so as to make the learning environment child-friendly and conducive to practice play-based instruction.
- ✓ Colleges of teacher education must have a clear guideline that limits the teacher educators' tendency of using teacher-centered teaching method and promotes play-based instruction.
- ✓ Methodology courses should be taught by the early childhood care and education professionals if available and unless, teacher educators who are assigned from other departments like Mathematics, Local Language and Environmental Science must get training that could familiarize them with the ECCE profession.

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