

Addis Ababa University
School of Post Graduate Studies

A study of Early Childhood Education Provision for Preschool
Children in Dilla Town, SNNPR

By

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This is to certify that the Dissertation prepared by Tefera Tirago, entitled: “A study of Early Childhood Education Provision for Preschool Children in Dilla Town, SNNPR”, and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Special Needs Education (Preschool Education) complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate early childhood education provision for preschool children and to explore appropriateness of the curriculum preschools use and identify the most pressing challenges that are influencing the preschool curriculum implementation in Gedeo zone of Dilla town, SNNPR. A total of 38 participants were selected purposefully and involved in interviews and focus group discussions. A qualitative case study approach was employed to extract in-depth information from the participants and preschool contexts. Accordingly, data were collected through interviews, observations, focus group discussions, document analysis, and video and photographing. The data were analyzed qualitatively and major themes and subthemes were identified from the transcribed data. The findings of the study revealed that the study participants had understanding concerning the role and values of the ECE for children's holistic learning and development. Accordingly, access for preschool education opportunity was increased in the different types of preschool education program (e.g. government, private, religious, NGO); however, access of the preschool education opportunity was not created for children with disabilities/special needs because of lack of awareness and negative attitude of the preschool administrators, teachers, parents and the community towards causes of disabilities and education of children with disabilities. Findings of this study also revealed that preschools used various kinds of curricula from different sources. Moreover, the study revealed that in consequence of these curricula from different sources, the curricula that were practiced in the preschools were not age appropriate. Finding of the study showed that academic areas focused curricula and teacher-centered teaching-learning approaches were more influential practices in the preschools rather than play-based curricula. Besides, findings of the study revealed that the appropriateness of ECE provision was challenged because of traditionally teachers and parents held experiences, teachers' low motivation, lack of adequate physical learning environment and facilities as well as large class size. In general ECE provision in most preschools was not followed appropriate play-based curriculum as recommended in regional or national preschool curriculum.

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ACRONYMS

AERA = American Educational Research Association

CWDs= Children with Disabilities

ECE = Early Childhood Education

FGD= Focus Group Discussion

LKG= Lower Kindergarten

MOESAA = Ministry of Education Statistical Annual Abstract

NAEYC = National Association for the Education of Young Children

NGOs =Non-governmental Organizations

OECD = Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

PreKG= Prekindergarten

SNNPREB= Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region Education Bureau

SNNPR=Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region

UKG=Upper Kindergarten

UNESCO= United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organizations

Woreda = Town administrative education office.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The period of early childhood is recognized as unique life time. “Early childhood” boundaries can range from ages two-and-a-half to eight; however, many educators and developmental psychologists regard the ages of three to six as a distinct and unified time of growth within this period and recognize significant developmental and cognitive shifts that occur at these times (Pinkham, Kaefer, & Neuman, 2012; NAEYC, 2009; Gonzalez-Mena, 2005; Elkind, 2001). In providing foundation during the early years, ECE design encompasses various activities and experiences to support children’s cognitive, physical and social development.

Early childhood education is service for children below compulsory school age involving elements of both physical activities and education. It is also believed that apart from the critical contribution to cognitive stimulation, socialization of child development, early education is an essential service for employed parents (Kamerman, 2007; Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2010); Goffin, & Wilson, 2001). As reported by Calman and Tarr-Whelan (2005) early education prepares children, especially at-risk children, for school and makes them more likely to start to learn and therefore they do better throughout school.

Early education is very important to support early development because early years offer a special opportunity to foster developmental gains in children; it is well documented that eighty percent of the brain’s capacity developed at early years (Kameraman, 2007; OECD, 2006). For preschool children with and without disabilities, educational objectives are most often referenced to language, cognitive, social, or motor development, or adaptive behavior. As described in various literatures such developmental skills are the foundation for later learning to improve children’s school success by enhancing their early social skills and knowledge (MOE, 2010; Manning, 2005; Lee & Hayden, 2009).

Furthermore, early childhood education is considered as the foundation for the growth and future development of all children below the age of six (Are, 2008). It also refers to the provision of basic needs, such as nutrition, warmth, health security affection,

interaction and stimulation for social, emotional, psychological, physical and cognitive development (Samuelsson & Kagan, 2008; Evans, Meyers, & Ilfeld, 2000). So this informs the reason why the periods of the early years are required to be handled with all special attention in school and at home. For this reasons, early childhood education settings can be planned for meaningful engagement and equitable outcomes for all children including children with special needs.

As pointed out by Bernhard, Lero and Greenberg (2006),and UNICEF (2003) young children with different abilities, challenges, resources, and cultural backgrounds and their families come together in early childhood settings. That is, early childhood inclusion embodied the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every preschool child, his or her family, regardless of ability to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society (Bennett & Kaga, 2010; NAEYC, 2009; UNESCO, 2006; UNICEF, 2003).

Many early childhood educators use the term developmentally appropriate practice to describe a more constructivist approach to learning. According to NAEYC (2009) and NAEYC (2003), preschool is a time for children to expand their love of learning, their general knowledge, their ability to get along with others and their interest in reaching out to the world. These realized that children attend preschool to learn to communicate, play and interact with their peers and objects. Thus, play provides children with the opportunity to interact with others, both adults and children in the appropriate learning environment. At the same time the value of play is increasingly recognized by the researchers and educators for children as the evidence to build up its relationship with intellectual achievement and emotional well-being (Whitebread, 2012; Martlew, Stephen, & Ellis, 2011; Shipley, 2008; Garvey, 1990).Moreover, the values of play in children development are reported by Whitebread (2012):

Play in all its rich variety is one of the highest achievements of the human species, alongside language, culture and technology...without play, none of these other achievements would be possible. However, is that one vital ingredient in supporting healthy intellectual, emotional and social development in young children is the provision of opportunities and the support for play (p.3-4).

For these reasons; therefore, early childhood education system gave more emphasize for the child-centered approaches that employ play-based curriculum. Hence, an age appropriate preschool education expected to be all-rounded, play-based,

integrated, flexible, and contextual. Hence, many research studies considered play as the guiding principle of the early childhood education curriculum. In ECE curriculum play recognized as the basis of learning, art as the basis of education for the special features of children's thinking, primacy of experience through the use of local materials, arts, and knowledge in the supportive learning environment (Frede & Ackerman, 2007; Manning, 2005; Baader, 2004). Thus, curriculum includes daily schedules and routines, the physical environment, play materials, learning experiences and, most importantly, the people who are part of the early child development setting so as to promote children's holistic development. It is also important to note that the unavailability of trained teachers, lack of quality of outdoor and indoor play materials, inappropriate physical environment and facilities have a great influence on preschool curriculum implementation.

Appropriate physical environment plays a significant role in children's learning and development. It is argued that physical environment is not only related to the materials and equipment but also to how his/her environment is organized, its attractiveness, for preschool children (Stonehouse, 2010; Lee & Hayden, 2009; Driscoll, 2003). In other words researchers considered, physical environment as a resource for supporting and encouraging children's self-expression, social interaction, and vital to create opportunities for both children with and without disabilities so as to develop social interaction. Moreover, thoughtfully designed and barrier free physical environment can support the activities that planned in a curriculum of the preschool education because play-based curriculum philosophy of a preschool has connection to the physical learning environment in relation to children learning and development. Therefore, early childhood education may consist of a number of activities and experiences that are designed to promote children's learning and development in a conducive learning environment because children are born with a natural curiosity about the world around them.

Moreover, a supportive learning environment is created through the interaction of the indoor and outdoor physical environment because the physical environment has a strong impact on children's learning and development. Research studies also identified that children learn best in a supportive learning environment that allows them to explore,

discover and play (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Kagan & Lowenstein, 2004; Moore, 2002).

The early childhood education can promote children's positive developmental experiences and independence whilst optimize learning and development because the earliest years of experiences can have a long-lasting implication for children's future. Many research studies also described that early childhood education plays a key role in further academic achievement, and will enhance productivity in adult life (Woodhead, 2009; UNESCO, 2008). Besides, Crim, Hawkins, Thornton, Rosof, Copley & Thomas (2008), and Ejieh (2006) state that if literacy ability begins well before children enter school, they can accelerate in an early childhood classroom setting. This is, many of the most fundamental values of tomorrow's society are also being formed in early childhood context today.

Many studies confirmed that successful early childhood programs can only be established and best realized through involvement of the parents because the school and the parents in an attempt could meet the unique and diverse needs of the children (Olsen, 2010; Boyer, 1992; Coombes, 1995; Little and Meighan, 1995). As pointed out by Bronfenbrenner & Ceci (1994) parent involvement in early childhood education bridges the home and school settings within an ecological framework. Thus, early childhood education is shared responsibility among parents, teachers, and education administrators/officials in order to access education opportunities for all children. Many studies also reported that parents, teachers and education administrators' understanding about the values of ECE play a crucial role in the process of creating access for the preschool education opportunity for children and have potential to shape next responsible generation (Samuelsson & Kagan, 2008; Woodhead; 2006; Hoot, Szente, & Mebratu, 2004). In other words teachers', educational administrators and parents' perception, understanding and experiences towards ECE could play a significant role reducing barriers and creating access of ECE opportunity for children. Thus, preschool administrators/owners, teachers, parents and the education experts understanding and perception about the role and values of ECE is indispensable so as to access education opportunities for all children.

Research studies demonstrated that early childhood education is the best hope and most effective means to achieve sustainable development of a country (MOE, 2010; UNESCO, 2008; UNESCO, 2006). Similarly much research studies justified ECE relating to the human development that the early years of every human being/life is the most favorable ones for developing the attitudes and values that form the basis of their personalities (Olsen, 2010; Woodhead, 2009; UNESCO, 2008).

Education for All (EFA) initiative from the 1990 World Conference on EFA in Jomtien, Thailand, the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal and the development of the Millennium Development Goals in the UN, have all led to an increase in government policies and local initiatives in the domain of early childhood education programs across the countries to expand and improve education for all children (UNESCO, 2000).

Although Ethiopia is one of the countries working towards all, notably concerning universal enrollment at the primary level, Young Lives research confirmed that the opportunity to attain pre-school is almost entirely restricted to urban children since the age of three (Woodhead, 2009; UNESCO, 2006: UNESCO, 2008). However, early childhood education in Ethiopia is not accessible for all children even for those children who are living in urban areas; it is not predominantly provided by the government. As described by Tassew (2011), and Woldehanna et al. (2008) the government has very limited involvement in this critical stage of education provision with the exception of some technical support and quality monitoring, because the government left this area for private sector, non-government organizations and religious institutions.

As stated in the international and national policies all children including children with disabilities have 'rights' to learn and live in society in accordance with the UNs convention on the 'rights' of child 1989 which was ratified by the Ethiopia government in 1991. However, the survey study that was carried out in Ethiopia confirmed that the existing early childhood education programs are not open door for children with disabilities (Tirussew, Teka, Belay, Demeke (2009). In order to provide preschool education for all, parents, teachers and administrators awareness and attitudes are crucial factors, especially to ensure the education rights for CWDs and to enroll them in the preschool programs.

Today, an important issue is that the government of Ethiopia has committed to implement early childhood education for children as a primary opportunity. Accordingly, educational institutions are also committed to create access of education opportunity and prior to their entering the primary school, but still the issue is practically not implemented sufficiently across the country on the ground. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the existing early childhood education provision/practices and to identify the most pressing challenges in early childhood education curriculum implementation in line with children learning and development. Therefore, in this study special emphasis will be given to explore early childhood educational provision and the most pressing challenges/barriers that influence the preschool curriculum implementation in Dilla town in eight preschools including government 'O' level or primary school-based preschools.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Research suggests that early childhood education plays an important role in learning and development, academic achievement, reduced grade repetition and dropout rate, increase higher graduation participation rates and promotes productivity in later life (MOE, 2005; Woodhead, 2009; UNESCO, 2008). Thus, through ECE the most fundamental values of tomorrow's society are being formed in early childhood context today. Although early childhood education is considered as the most effective means to achieve sustainable development in all areas of human life, in Ethiopia majority of the children did not obtain opportunity for ECE (Woodhead, 2009; UNESCO, 2008; UNESCO, 2006). The researchers also criticized ECE opportunity in Ethiopia that modern preschool education has very long past, there has been little progress in the expansion of preschools in Ethiopia (Hoot, Szente, & Mebratu, 2004; Woodhead, Ames, Vennam, Abebe, & Streuli, 2009).

The preschool years of children's life are globally recognized as the most critical period for lifelong learning and optimal development in terms of physical, social/emotional, and cognitive domains. However, the study that was carried out in Ethiopia demonstrates that preschool education program is not affordable in the country for the majority of the children, even for those who are living in the urban (Szente, Hoot, & Tadesse, 2007). This problem also requires a scientific research so as to resolve the problem and increase the access of early childhood education in the country.

As mentioned earlier, Ethiopia has ratified major international conventions and human rights agreements adopted by the United Nations and other international organizations such as on the Rights of the Child (RC), which include expanding and improving quality early childhood education for all children (MOE, 2010; UNESCO, 2000). However, access for ECE opportunity are challenged by the personal and environmental factors such as lack of appropriate curriculum and lack of supportive learning environment.

Although the government of Ethiopian has committed to access quality early childhood education opportunities for all preschool children, it is practically challenged in the implementation stage particularly opportunity of ECE for the children with special needs. As clearly pointed out in the national ECCE policy framework and strategic plan MOE (2010) the major objectives of the national preschool education are “promoting and supporting accessible, equitable and quality ECE services for all children, particularly for children with disabilities/special needs” (p. 35). Nevertheless, due to lack of awareness and negative attitude of the administrators, teachers, parents and the community towards persons with disabilities/special education needs may not get opportunity for preschool education. The survey study that was carried out in Ethiopia argued that the existing early childhood education programs are not open door for children with disabilities (Tirussew, Teka, Belay, & Demeke, 2009). Despite policy implementation problem existing in the preschools, it is vital to carry out research on the process of ECE provision in preschool in relation to children with education needs.

Currently Ethiopia has established integrated early childhood education policy, and implementation guideline which covers the period from prenatal up to the primary school program; however, low government involvement has led to the fragmented ECE curriculum implementation and teacher-centered teaching-learning strategy. It is argued by UNESCO (2012) that preschools still use largely academic and teacher-centered teaching strategy rather than play-based/child-centered approaches. Several factors have influenced such kinds of approaches such as dynamics outside the realm of control of the school systems, like low parent-teacher relationship and teachers’ competence and lack of supportive learning materials. So, it is very important to investigate based on the

questions why and how teachers practice focused more of academic areas and teacher-centered instructional approaches.

Despite the fact that many preschools in Ethiopia used various types of curricula from different sources that are not related to the children's age and culture. Accordingly, Mulugeta (2015) and Tirussew, et al. (2009) argued that it is common to see preschools with foreign curriculum materials/textbooks and play materials that have impacts on Ethiopian children's learning and development in relation to the cultural values and norms of the country. In this study these factors are also considered as the challenges/barriers in early childhood education provision in Dilla town because study was not carried out whether the existing national curriculum appropriate or not and studies also were not carried out concerning the understanding and concepts of the teachers and preschools' education administrators about the new preschool policy and curriculum.

In Ethiopia, early childhood education is predominantly provided by the private sector, NGOs, faith based organizations and other private owners with scarce learning resources and low facilities. As many literatures justified, preschools are challenged in Ethiopia to provide age appropriate preschool education due to inadequate quality learning environment such as unavailable material resources, physical learning environment and lack of trained staff (MOE, 2010; Yisak, Workneh & Asham, 2009; MOE, 2005; MOE, 2002). In fact, no matter what factors cause the problems; low quality preschool learning environment can affect children's learning and development. Therefore, in this study more emphasis would be given to explore the existing situation of preschool learning environment and facilities in relation to the early childhood education.

As many researchers described, early childhood is a crucial time for the development of mental and physical functions of children; it requires a hands-on and interactive learning in the social and physical environment which are able to provide opportunities for children to learn about themselves and world around them (Grotewell & Burton, 2008; Samuelsson and Johansson, 2006; NAEYC, 2003; NAEYC, 1993). Thus, inadequate preschool physical learning environment can influence children's physical and social development so that physical learning environment required to be safe, attractive and rich with play materials that are able to inspire children for exploration and

experiencing world around them. Accordingly, this study explore how ECE provision is influenced by the inappropriate physical environment in relation to children learning and development

Another concern in ECE education provision is lack of qualified preschool directors and education administrators/experts in ECE, particularly administrators who are working in different educational administration levels. It may also consider as can affect appropriate preschool curriculum implementation. The study that was carried out by Tigistu (2013) confirmed that in Ethiopia majority of the existing education administrators or education officials at the different levels of education sector do not have direct ECE related qualifications and many of the staff members also have qualifications in unrelated disciplines at either diploma or first degree level. Hence, most of them have very little or no specialization related to children's early years education. Accordingly, this study will explore how the education administrators and teachers qualification influenced ECE curriculum implementation, because lack of qualified teachers and administrators in preschool education is considered as one of the problems that can hinder play-based preschool curriculum implementation and it might cause for the poor learning outcome.

The research studies that are carried out in Ethiopian by Habitamu (1996) and Tassew (2011) pointed out that the regional governments and the community at large seems to be relatively aware of the advantage of the early childhood education. However, they do not seem to be aware of its critical role and are not allocating adequate resources to this sub-sector. As a result, the participation rate of children in preschool education is still very low. For example, in Ethiopia as described in the Ministry of Education Statistics Annual Abstract 2016 and 2018 reports, the preschool Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) was 49% and 49.5% respectively for all forms of preschool programs (e.g. Private, religious, "O" level and child-to child), but, this increase did not occur equally throughout the country. Even if today numbers of private pre-schools, NGOs, religious institutions have increased, still ECE benefits the most advantaged urban people who are able to pay school fee. In order to narrow this gap the government-subsidized primary school-based preschools ("O" level) and community-based pre-schools are playing their own role to create opportunity for the parents of low socio-economic background.

However, enrollment in the government-subsidized programs is often high resulting in overcrowded classrooms or large class size (Szente, Hoot & Tadesse, 2007; Fisher & Swindells, 1998). These reveal that preschools have problems to provide effective quality ECE for preschool children in line with social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

This case study; therefore, aimed at exploring ECE provision for preschool children in Dilla town, particularly focusing on the problems of preschool curriculum implementation, physical environment and facilities, participants' perception about the role and values of ECE and challenges in the ECE provision in line with children's learning and development. Hence, the lack of research conducted in the Dilla town of Gedeo zone instigated the researcher for the inevitable concern of the early childhood education practices in preschools.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate early childhood education provision for preschool children and to explore appropriateness of the curricula preschools use in line with children learning and development, and the most pressing challenges/barriers in curriculum implementation in the preschools.

The study would also explore early childhood education provision for all preschool children including children with special needs because ECE is considered as early childhood intervention program. For example, Tirussew (2005, p.67) stated that "early childhood education program" is early intervention program. For this reason, access of early childhood education is indispensable to overcome at risk situations of children at early ages. Another purpose of the study was to explore conduciveness of the supportive learning environment in preschool curriculum implementation or preschool education provision in line with children's holistic learning and development as well as to explore administrators, teachers and parents understanding of the role and values of preschool education in the process of early childhood education provision. Eventually to forward substantial information for education administrators and planners how they can overcome challenges in implementing preschool curriculum.

Furthermore, to this researcher's knowledge there is no research that has been carried out in Dilla town beforehand regarding the early childhood education practices

and challenges on the preschool curriculum implementation in line with children's learning and development. Accordingly, this research uses a qualitative case study to answer the research questions that are framed for this study.

1.3.1. Specific objectives

The following were specific objectives of the study:

- To identify perception of administrators, teachers and parents about the roles and values of preschool education
- To examine accessibility of preschool education for children with disabilities
- To explore types of curricula that is implemented in the preschools and its appropriateness for children learning and development.
- To identify and describe appropriateness of the preschool physical environment and facilities for the children learning and development.
- To examine participants' demands children to learn for their holistic learning and development.
- To identify the major challenges that influence the practices of curricula in the preschools and suggest solutions

1.4. Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of the study the following research questions are posed:

1. How are the role and value of preschool education understood and perceived by the administrators, teachers and parents? And what beliefs do participants hold regarding education of children with disabilities/special needs?
2. What do participants demand children to learn for their holistic development/learn more in preschools?
3. What types of curricula are the preschools using and how is it implemented?
4. What physical environment and facilities are required for children learning and development?
5. How are they conducive to support their learning and development?
6. What are the challenges/barriers for children's learning and development?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to contribute to the overall understanding about best practices of early childhood education and to overcome challenges in the preschool

curriculum implementation. The researcher will make a great effort to ascertain using a case study investigation, in-depth information on preschool education in Dilla administrative town in order to delineate the factors that affect the nature of preschool education provision and play-based curriculum implementation. Particularly, this study focuses on whether the administrators, teachers and parents have understanding of the role and values of preschool education for the children's learning and development and how they managed challenges in preschool education provision. Findings of this study help administrators and teachers to be aware of the importance and benefits of play-based curriculum and will help practically implement this approach inside and outside classroom of the preschool.

Therefore, the research findings to be obtained from this study will be of major significance to a number of stake-holders in the early childhood education system. For this reason, the result would help to mobilize concerned bodies to opportunity of preschool education for all children and improve the existing challenges in preschool education.

The findings of the study also generate useful information for preschools, governmental and non-governmental organizations which are engaged in the provision of early childhood education program and for those persons who are interested to invest in preschool education. Besides, the findings may also help the national and regional planners, policy makers and Woreda educational experts to explore more possible strategies for accessing, facilitating and improving early childhood education. In addition, the outcome of this research will help as the springboard, for the other interested researchers. Finally the study could highlight problems in preschool curriculum implementation and provide suggestions on possible solutions to the educational administrators for improvement.

1.6. Definition of Key Terms

A number of key terms employed in this research need to be defined because they share common characteristics in the literature and may be used interchangeably. The following definitions are used in this study for clarity:

Curriculum material: For the purposes of this study the terms, curriculum material, instructional materials, and curriculum content/preschool textbook contents, are used interchangeably.

Development: A process of change in which a child comes to master more and more complex levels of moving, thinking, feeling, and interacting with people and objects in the environment (Evans et al., 2000,p. 392).

Government primary school-based preschool or “O” level program= the program that is carried out by the government to provide free preschool education for children before primary education program

Holistic education/development: refers a broad development of the children and focuses on their intellectual, emotional, social, physical development (Miller, 1991 p. 3).

Kindergarten: In the Ethiopian context, describes the educational year before formal school. The term is used interchangeably with the term preschool. So kindergarten, currently in Ethiopia, is a part of preschool setting.

Preschool education: The term “pre-school education” refers to education that children attend prior to entering primary school. For the purpose of this research report preschool education also used early childhood education (ECE). Therefore, preschool education, and early childhood education (ECE) used *interchangeably throughout this research report*, with a focus on the educational aspects of preschool children. In these research children’s age limitation because of birth registration problem in the study area.

Preschool: The term “preschool” is used to describe settings children attend prior to entering primary school or formal schooling. The preschool program caters for the acquisition of basic skills (pre-reading, pre- writing and arithmetic) in preparation for the child’s formal schooling (MOE, 2010, p. 25).The preschool year is also referred as kindergarten.

Primary school-based preschool education: government “O” level or Zero class program which is provided school readiness skills development in primary schools. So primary school-based preschool education and “O” classes/level used interchangeably throughout this research report

Proprietors: in some preschools owners or proprietors act or serve as the principals/directors. For this reason, directors/proprietors used in some cases in this study

Student-centered: An instructional approach based on constructivist learning and shared responsibility between teacher and student; child initiated learning (Garrett 2008; Edwards, 2004; Willower 1975).

Teacher-centered: An instructional approach focused on the teacher delivering information in a one way transmission. The learning environment is custodial in nature with the teacher making the majority of the decisions (Garrett, 2008; Willower, 1975).

Woreda education office: Town administrative education office is responsible to control quality of preschool education and to offer license for the interested individuals and organizations to invest/establish preschools as well it has responsibility to support government “O” level free education program or free education in government primary school-based preschool program facilitating all important resources.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1. Review of the Literature

2.1.1. Definition of early childhood education

Early childhood education is a broad term that comprises any type of educational program that provided to serve children before entering primary school. Hence, it refers to the educational program that serves children before school years. In terms of children's life, it is the period from birth to eight years of age. However, by school terms, early childhood education incorporates the group setting for infants through elementary school grade three (Miles & Singal, 2010). Grotewell and Burton (2008) and NAEYC (1993) also shared this definition and elaborated accordingly as the time between the zero and eight years of age. As defined by (Elliot, 2006; Seng, 1994) ECE is that provided for children early years before compulsory schooling. Early childhood education typically grouped under the umbrella term "Preschool services" "early childhood service" although these terms can cover a range of services that are operated funded and regulated by different bodies and with different functions, goals and approaches. However, early childhood education is more than preparation for primary school so that it aims the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical developments so as to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

During this stage, children are highly influenced by the environment and the people that surround them. In order to overcome such challenges early education should cultivate children in terms of socialization rather than purely academic enhancement. As Webb (2003) states children learn cooperation through education at early age that helps them to obey rules and stay safe in a society. Regarding socialization, parents also share the same perspective. It is one of the biggest reasons for parents sending children to early childhood education settings are to get them socialized (Seng, 1994). According to Heckman, Pinto, & Savelyev (2013) early education programs, also known as early childhood education programs thus early developmental education refers to early learning programs. In general these programs give emphasis on the importance of cognitive development, parental interactions, and emotional growth early and as a means to support healthy learning and development. According to International Labor Organization /ILO (2012) early childhood education program covers policies, structures, and human

resource up to the age at which children begin primary education. The coverage is intended to be worldwide, from high income countries with well development ECE systems to the poorest countries with minimal provision formal or informal.

Generally, the huge diversity of early childhood education provision is equally by the diversity of terms used to define it. Countries and international institutions use different terms (Webb, 2003; ILO, 2012) like early childhood education and care (ECEC); early childhood development (ECD) and early childhood education (ECE). The latter is used with a focus on the education aspects of services as opposed to the broader concepts of “care” and education (ILO, 2012). ECE in this report refers to services for the whole age range of children four to six years plus, although with a focus on education rather than care, most of the available information is focused on the three to six old age groups. Sometimes this age group uses the term “preprimary” education in line with UNESCO usage (ILO, 2012, p. 1). The preschool education programs are primarily designed for children according to the policy to introduce a school type environment, to provide a bridge between home and school, and are variously referred to as infant; nursery or preschool education, kindergarten or early childhood education but other terms include children centers, preparatory education and initial education (ILO, pp. 2). For the purpose of this study’s report, ECE includes all kinds of education programs taking place before compulsory primary education (which begins at three plus to six plus years old) provided in different settings like preschool/kindergartens as mentioned in the national ECE policy document, 2010 Ethiopia. However, finding registered real age of the children in Dilla town (research area) is difficult because many of expected mothers gave birth at home. As a result heterogeneous group of children are placed in the preschools.

2. 1.2. Early childhood education and development

As mentioned earlier early childhood education is a widely used term to describe any type of educational program that serves children in their preschool years before entering formal school (Friendly, Doherty & Beach, 2006; Miller, 1996). Early childhood education may consist of any number of activities and experiences designed to aid in the cognitive, physical and social development of preschoolers before they enter elementary school. The literature also points this period as a crucial time relating to the mental and physical development. It is also believed that early childhood is a crucial time for the

development of the mental and physical (gross and fine motor) functions of children; it should be focused on “learning through play” by providing a hands-on, interactive environment where children learn about themselves through playing with other children (Grotewell & Burton, 2008; NAEYC, 1993). This implies that children can learn about themselves and their environment playing with objects and human through interaction in the conducive learning environment.

Moreover, in a child development rhythmic, stability and manipulative skills are important and can be addressed in a number of ways. As explained by Dunphy (2008); Bowman, Donovan and Burns, (2001), these activities should have a meaningful link with social, emotional, and cognitive development. Hence, the development includes the emergence of the abilities and skills in area such as language; motor, social/emotional, cognitive and learning, that is greatly influenced by external factors. As described by Copple & Bredekamp (2009) and Garvey (1990) children’s learning and development can be influenced by the external factors including the nature of the educational environment to which the children are exposed during the early years of life and socio-economic background of the parents.

Children’s development happens within the context of children’s daily lives in families and communities. Accordingly, literature explained that early childhood development and learning patterns are shaped by a complex array of environmental and biological factors (White & Coleman, 2000). Moreover, the National Association for the Education of Young (NAEYC) stated that genetic make-up, quality of interpersonal relationships within and outside the family, the quality of environment and experiences, and range of programs and supports available to enable optimal development and learning impact on the pattern and timing of development (NAEYC, 2009; NAEYC, 2003; 1993). Thus, adults support is crucial to match curriculum and teaching to children’s emerging competencies, needs, and interests, moving forward by targeting educational experiences that is age appropriate and challenges, but not frustrate them.

2.1.3. Early childhood development and learning

Development and learning are dynamic processes that require age appropriate education and appropriate learning environments as well as adults close follow up in the continuum of children development. As stated by Allen & Marotz (2009) and White

&Coleman (2000) the range of development describes predictable sequences of development within broad domains of development. Hence, the range of developmental process helps early childhood practitioners observe and document children's emerging skills, based on children's development.

Development can be seen in the progressive changes that a learner makes along one dimension or skill over time (White & Coleman, 2000; Novak, 1996). Hence, progressive changes in the nature of interaction between the learner and their environment are described as development. Children develop, not merely because of the passage of times but because of particular meaningful experiences they had at important times. Another research result also clearly justified developmental time relating to the new experience that children possess the necessary prerequisite skills and abilities to take advantage of this new experience (Bijou & Ribes, 1996).

Many studies justify that development has distinct characteristics and its process is dynamic. The learner is ever changing each new experience creating a new perceptive. Besides, development occurs through progressive process, is nonlinear and may occur in spurts and leaps or once at a time. This varying pace and sometimes, sequence of developmental events is observed in the case of identical twins reared together have shown different skills at different times and action is required for development to unfold (UNESCO, 2006; NAEYC, 2003; Novak, 1996). That is, there is interdependency between young children and their environment and as children grow older, they develop in several different ways includes physical, intellectual, social, and emotional.

Research has shown that half of a person's intelligence potential is developed at early age and that early childhood interventions can have lasting effect on intellectual capacity, personality and social behavior (Levitt, 2008; Kamerman, 2007; Inan, 2009). However, early development can be influenced by both biological and environment factors. Hence, for the early childhood development's vulnerability, neither nurture nor nature alone can take full credit for a child's development. For example, a stimulating environment including reading, singing, talking and playing is essential to children's development. Conversely, McCain and Mustard (2007) stated that a harmful or deprived environment exposure to toxins, malnutrition adult insufficient exposure to stimulating, challenging experiences, and lack of nurturing and supportive environment can interfere

with optimal development because development has its own principles on the child development.

Supportive environment can promote children's self-esteem and sense of confidence. The research studies described that early development can be reinforced by supportive parents and teachers (Ryan and Adams, 1995 as cited in White, 2000). According to these authors' children who receive emotional support feel safe, and feeling safe has many educational benefits:

- It gives children courage to seek out and adapt to new learning situations;
- It reinforces children's right to assert their feelings;
- It also encourage children to work cooperatively with peers and adults

Children development in the world is in a "constant flux" or events (White, 2000, p.11). Thus, children are influenced directly or indirectly by the environmental factor such asocial, business, religious, and legislative events.

A top priority for early childhood education is creating supportive learning environment children develop basic arithmetic, reading and writing skills. Using developmentally appropriate practices, while incorporating foundational concepts into lessons help teachers differentiate instruction, engage children in the learning process, and increase achievement of all children. As stated by Copple and Bredekamp (2009)when children are treated as unique individuals, all practices should be appropriate to the child's age and development stage and build on previously taught concepts.

As discussed by Copple and Bredekamp (2009); Evans (2006) and Miller (1996), children are highly motivated to understand and experience their environment. Thus the principle of learning is that children can do things first in a supportive context and then later independently and in a variety of contexts. Rogoff (1990) describes the process of adult-assisted learning as "guided participation" to emphasize that children actively collaborate with others to move complex levels of understanding and skills development.

It is believed that learning experiences of the preschool years can influence the rest of a child's life. This early period in development provides a foundation that guides children academically, socially and emotionally. Children's learning and intellectual growth are profoundly affected by development in the early years (Friendly, Doherty, &Beach, 2006; Copple, & Bredekamp, 2009).A large contribution to bring about child

development is providing parental training, among other factors, promotes desirable child development, because parents can play a large role in a child's learning and development.

It is clearly described that a basic understanding process of learning is essential for those who intend to develop activities that will have the potential to lead to effective learning taking place in classrooms and out of classrooms (Morrow, 2004; Pritchard, 2009).

Young children in the early childhood years, who are in the preoperational period according to Piaget's stage of development; learning through authentic experiences presented to them in a manner that is safe and appropriate to their level of development. Although children have inquisitive imaginations, experience is a child who has conversation to share with adults and children (White & Coleman, 2000); Novak, Miller, 1996). This means that children are curious for more experience and information hence, through the experience and information; they could construct their own frame of knowledge.

Children can learn through observation but this kind of learning does not afford the child the same opportunities as actually being involved in the discovery oriented, hands on process. Literatures realized that a child learns more often engaging in an experience because they love to repeat the same activities. Knowledge is not something that is poured into child by an external source, but something the child has to construct for himself or herself. This is why Piaget's theory is also called constructivist theory (Miller, 1996; Levine, 2005; Evans, 2006).

According to (Miller, 1996) children learn through experiences with interactive materials. These interactive materials include:

- dramatic play materials, dollhouse and accessories, hollow blocks
- small unit blocks and accessories, logos, woodworking, manipulative (items that fit together)
- a variety of gross motor play
- materials for games such as musical games, board games, outdoor games and thinking games (Miller, 1996, pp. 18-19).

Children can learn in so many ways at home and school environment through feedbacks and social interactions. Children learn through feedback and need motivated with them to continue to be involved in activity; "feedback consists of success with the materials being worked with or feedback from peers or adults who comment positively

about what the child has accomplished with the materials” (Miler,1996, pp. 18). The same author explained that children also learn interacting with their peer and adults. Children who spend considerable time alone miss out on valuable opportunities for learning. Children do grow and develop from the experiences they have during the time spend exploring by themselves but there is a great difference between being given the opportunity to explore with supervision and support versus being left alone with no stimulation or support.

From this perspective, successful learning depends on the provision and implementation of meaningful curriculum (Bredenkamp & Rosegrant, 1992). So meaningful curriculum enables children to make sense of what they are learning and to connect their experiences in ways that lead to rich conceptual development.

2.1.4. Main theories describing and explaining early childhood development and learning

Several theories describe child development and learning; the following theoretical perspectives describe of child development and learning which early childhood educator fall. In child development theories are an organized set of ideas that are designed to explain and make predictions about the development and learning. There are many theories of child development and learning. As research studies demonstrated, theories have had intensive impact on preschool learning practice (Aldridge & Goaldman, 2007; Allen & Marotz, 2009). However, for the sake of discussion on the early childhood education provision and curriculum implementation in line with learning and development, four important theories have been discussed as follows.

Maturation theory is an early childhood theory that emphasizes the child as a growing organism in which knowledge exist. Maturation theory was advanced by the work of Gesell and maturationists believe that development is a biological process that occurs automatically in predictable sequential states over time (Allen & Marotz, 2009; Aldridge & Goaldman, 2007). As the study confirmed the maturational theory is biologically based and assumes that children mature at rates according to their biological time (Allen & Marotz, 2009). Thus genetics promotes development in a specific sequence depending on individual differences (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Accordingly learning

depends on development and is not changed or effected by environment, experience or teaching.

According to Meyerhoff (2006) developmental behaviors that included in the maturational theory are: motor adaptive, language and personal social. As explained by Gesell (1925), and Pritchard (2009), behavior and growth patterns in each of development is predictable and follows a specific sequence. Because of biological basis of each developmental stage, children cannot be rushed through any stage. For example, children are able to walk when their neurological system is matured enough to allow them to do so. Nevertheless, maturational theory explains that a child development cannot be imported by educational stimulation or remedial work (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Dalton, 2005; Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Smith & Shepard, 1987). According to the maturational theory, time to mature is the only support that can be given to children who have not reached a developmental milestone. Besides, Gesell claimed that a child was most successful in school when readiness and promotion were based on the developmental age (Dalton, 2005; Smith & Shepard, 1987).

Preschool education programs are partially results of maturational theory (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). For example, the present day system for determining disability is based on the maturational theory, for instance in USA schools for children with disabilities determined based on maturational theory. Difficulties children experience in school are said to be within the child once problems are identified, children are tested to determine and label their problem such as attention deficit, hyperactive disorders (ADHDs), learning disability among others (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Smith & Shepard, 1987).Based on the maturation theory, when children are not able to perform at grade level, they are determined to have a biological or genetically based problem while environmental factors, like (e.g. teaching strategy, curriculum, classroom environment etc.) are largely ignored. According to maturationists view, children development reflects a specific and prearranged scheme or plan within the body. In Gesell's view (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007), development is simply a natural unfolding of a biological plan, experience matters little. Gesell encourages parents to let their children develop naturally. Without interference from adults, he claimed, behavior like speech, play and reasoning would emerge spontaneously according to predetermined

development timetable. This perspective leads many educators and families to assume that young children will acquire knowledge in naturally as they grow physically and become older, provided that they are healthy (Meyerhoff, 2006; Aldridge & Goaldman, 2007).

Maturationists believe that all healthy young children arrive for learning to school readiness when they perform tasks such as reciting the alphabet and counting, so that these tasks required for learning more complex tasks such as reading and arithmetic, and development and school readiness occur naturally and automatically. In contrast if a child is developmentally unready for school, maturationists might suggest referrals to transitional kindergartens, retention or holding children out of the school for an additional year (Aldridge & Goaldman, 2007, Hunt, 1969).

This theory is used by educators and parents when young children developmentally lag behind their peers and to plan education according to their needs, interest and capacity. The children's underperformance is interpreted as the child needing more time to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to perform at the level of their peers. Therefore this theory provides appropriate information and guidance to understand maturity level of children for ECE placement, especially difficulties that children experience in preschool.

According to behavioral theory; however, learning is gradual and continuous whereas development is a sequence of specific conditional behaviors. Main emphasis is on the environment and observable behaviors are considered most important in behavioral theory. According to behaviorists view, learning occurs as a result of observable changes in human behavior that are acquired through conditioning, a process achieved by interactions with the environment (Stipek, & Byler, 1997; Bijou & Ribes, 1996). Thus, learning refers simply as the acquisition of new behavior and development is focused on observable behaviors and discounting any mental activity. This means that development and learning are attributed almost exclusively to environmental influences (nurture). Bijou and Ribes (1996) justified that B.F. Skinner built on other behaviorist theorists by noting those children's behavior and learning can be shaped by providing rewards and punishment. He believed that there is a great deal of diversity in behavior

and learning because all children experience different rewards and punishment from the adults in their lives.

At the other extreme, a behaviorist view assumes that children's development is outside of their own influence, but shaped by environmental stimuli. According to this view, development consists of learning sets of relatively passive responses to environmental stimuli, such as the teacher. Daniels and Shumow (2002), and Bijou and Ribes (1996) argued that beliefs associated with the behaviorist view include the ideas that children are not intrinsically motivated to learn what adults deem important, and that their recollection of pieces of knowledge given to them by the teacher is a valued developmental outcome. The behaviorist theory was found to be relevant in early childhood education provision to the teacher-directed instructional practices, including didactic instruction with emphasis on acquisition of basic skills.

From behavioral perspectives, internal and cognitive processes are invisible and cannot be studied scientifically, thus outward behavior is the key indicator of human learning. In general behaviorism, there is a relationship among three factors: antecedent conditions (stimuli), behaviors (responses), and consequent conditions or rewards or punishments (Stipek, & Byler, 1997). In this perspective, a response can be predicted when a stimulus is given. This might encourage teachers to use a positive stimulus such as praise, friendly attitude and to increase a desired response from children like hard working, motivated attitude, which may lead to a positive consequence or high achievement. Similarly, a negative stimulus can discourage an undesirable response (e.g. student talking), which can lead to a decrease in the negative behavior. Moreover, behavioral theorists believe that teachers can play a significant role in effecting learning by determining what to teach with objectives based on desired behavior. In other words, there should be programmed instruction to shape responses for successful outcomes. Hence, planned instruction refers to a system of teaching and learning within which pre-established subject matter is broken down into small, discrete steps and carefully organized into a logical way.

Behaviorism equates learning with changes in either the form or frequency of observable performance and accomplished when a proper response is demonstrated following the presentation of a specific environmental stimulus. But no attempt is made

to determine the structure of a student's knowledge or to assess which mental processes it is necessary for them to use (Novak, 1996; Pritchard, 2009; Bijou, 1993). The learner is characterized as being reactive to conditions in the environment as opposed to taking an active role in discovering the environment.

Although both learner and environmental factors are considered important by behaviorists, environmental conditions receive the greatest emphasis. The most critical factor, however, is the arrangement of stimuli and consequences within the environment. In general behaviorists attempt to prescribe strategies that are most useful for building and strengthening stimulus-response associations (Pritchard, 2009; Stipek, & Byler, 1997), including the use of instructional cues, practice, and reinforcement. These prescriptions have generally been proven reliable and effective in facilitating learning that involves discriminations or recalling facts, generalizations, and associations, and chaining or automatically performing a specified procedure.

Preschool education, according to the environmentalist is the age or stage when young children can respond appropriately to the environment of the school and classroom. For example, rules and regulations, curriculum activities, positive behavior in group settings, and directions and instructions from teachers and other adults in the school (Pritchard, 2009). Therefore, this study has connection to respond appropriately environment is necessary for young children to participate in both teacher initiated and child-initiated learning activities. However, success is depend on the child following instruction and environmentalists influenced teachers and parents believe that young children learn best by rote activities, such as reciting the alphabet over and over copying letters, and tracing numbers thus, such approaches are common in most of the preschools in Ethiopia. These view points are evident in preschool classrooms where young children are expected to sit at desks arranged in rows and listens attentively to their teachers.

On the other hand constructivism is a theory of learning based on the idea that knowledge is constructed by the knower based on mental activity. Learners are considered to be active organisms seeking meaning. The constructivist theory of learning and development was advanced by theorists such as Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, and Lev Vygotsky. Although their work varies greatly, each articulates a similar context of learning and development. Specifically, it is believed that Vygotsky's theory of social

constructivism provides the broader context for thinking about complexities of learning in today preschools (Katz, 2015; Hand & Nourot, 1999; Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Vygotsky (1978) recognizes the importance of social interaction as well as social constructs for creating heightened learning experiences. Therefore, the child is viewed as an active learner where knowledge is seen as dynamic process since it is constructed through interaction.

In addition, constructivists believe that young children initiate most of the activities required for learning and development, because active interaction with the environment and people are crucial for learning and development (Hand & Nourot, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivists believe that children are ready for school when they can initiate many of the interactions they have with the environment and people around them. For instance, when adults provide young children picture book containing very large print, and toys that stimulate interaction (such as building blocks and large puzzles), children build their knowledge using the materials existing in the environment (Katz, 2015; Bailey & Wolery, 1992; Katz & Chard, 1990). Piaget emphasized the role of environment as building knowledge. So this theory use to guide how a teacher provides appropriate materials, the child can play them, manipulate them and do experiments with them to understand the world round them and build his/her knowledge.

Vygotsky use the term “social situation of development” assuming that a social situation determines the forms and the path that the child will follow in the course of development and learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Besides, he explained that the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the stage of the learning process, when an individual child is unable to solve the problems alone, but needs the help of proximal development (Crain, 2005; Copple, 2009). Hence, interaction with peers and environment assist children as they learn from not only their peers but also adults. It is well documented that Vygotsky’s studies had included cultural influences on learning and child’s acquisition of speech and a concept called the zone of proximal development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Crain, 2005). These are tasks or activities children cannot do by themselves; they need the support of a peer, teacher, or other adults to assist them before they can complete the task independently.

This process is a means for assisting, or scaffolding children and their learning (Copples, 2009, Morrison, 2006; Crain, 2005). Accordingly, Vygotsky (1978) explains that scaffolding was the way children develop new concepts, or moved into higher levels of thinking. Thus the zone of proximal development is Vygotsky's term for the place in learning where children are able to investigate new concepts with modeled help "what the child is able to do in collaboration today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 211). Scaffolding is one way that children can begin to integrate spontaneous and scientific knowledge. As clearly stated by Karpov (2003) scaffolding requires teachers support for an activity that is gradually reduced as the students learn the process, helps children move further within or maximizing, their efforts within their one of proximal development and internalize the learning process in relation to building emergent literacy skills, modeling, questioning, and working with peer partners. In addition, literatures demonstrate that scaffolding strategies that are based on Vygotsky principles help children learn to read and write by connecting these activities to familiar cultural activities from home (Morrison, 2006; Tudge & Hogan, 1997).

The research study realized that in classroom setting, teacher use scaffolding both to assess a child's zone of proximal development and to instruct a child within his or her zone (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005). When children are asked to complete tasks that are outside of their zone of proximal development, it leads both the children and teacher for the frustration. Bodrova and Leong (2003) stated how examples are used scaffolding in literacy instruction, including the scaffolding writing method, which helps children learn to write. For instance, a teacher starts by drawing a line for each work while a student speaks what he or she wants to write and the children then repeat the message while pointing to a line for each word. Hence, the children write letters or group of letters or symbols on the line to represent the word. As the child begins to internalize the strategy, he or she is expected to complete the process alone, until eventually the need for the lines is extinguished. Such kind of scaffolding strategy is traditionally common in Ethiopia during the academic areas teaching-learning and teacher-directed instruction approach. So this has connection to when study ECE provision and curriculum implementation in the preschool.

However, it could be successful in preschool education program when learning environment appropriate for play-based and child-initiated learning activities. Thus, according to the constructivist perspectives, learning occurs when individuals are actively engaged in the learning process and integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge (Bigge & Shermis, 2004). So learning for preschool children should be considered as an active process of constructing rather than receiving knowledge and teaching is also considered as a process of supporting children to construct ideas rather than delivering knowledge. As pointed out by Brown and Green (2006) learners are not supposed to wait for knowledge to be filled but play an active role to seek meaning and nurture self-awareness. Therefore, the researcher believed that this study mainly guided by the constructivist point of view.

Moreover, an ecological systems theory is placed how both on environment and heredity could shape development and child outcome within the context of their world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He described four systems that influence development from micro system to macro system, and considered that the person's biology also has contributed to this system. Thus, Bronfenbrenner ecological system theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment. This theory has nested structures, and it referred as the microsystems, mesosystem, exosystems and macrosystems .Microsystems involves those that are part of children's most immediate environment, including the child's parents and other primary caregivers such as school teachers and peers. That is interactions between the child and those adults impact children's development. In relation to this, Mvula (2009) described that children are raised by being acclimatized into family and community values which give them a strong sense of belonging from where they gain confidence, feel secure and develop trust.

The second system is the mesosystems involves systems that interact with the people in the microsystem, including child care programs and schools. For example, parents interact with preschools, or as neighbors interact with each other. Thus, at the mesosystems level the peer group, school and family systems interact with one another. However, the child is not directly involved with the mesosystems, but a child is affected by the systems. Exosystems are places in which children do not spend time but the

systems affect the child's development and socialization as do all the systems. In the case of the young child, the exosystem might include the parents' place of work, the parents' network of friends, the activities of the local school board, legal services and their extended family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As described by Berk (2000, pp. 29) the macrosystems contain "the values, laws, customs, and resources of a particular culture". For example, the attitudes of the community or a culture's beliefs about the importance of ECE impact children's learning and development. This theory provides an explanation on how environmental influences the children are learning and development.

Early childhood development is considered holistic and of good quality when it cover cognitive, emotional, physical and social development and drains from the theories of different discipline such as education and psychology. Of the four integrated areas cognitive development draws from behavior, which argues that people learn through observation and experiences. As pointed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory is important to understand children's learning and development and establishing productive programs to promote the development of children in the settings and circumstances in which children live. In the process of children learning and development, teachers make many decisions that can be informed by an understanding of the context in which children live. These decisions include curricular and instructional decisions about materials and methods used in the classroom as well as teacher-parent relationships. Teachers' guidance of children's classroom learning can be fostered by understanding how the knowledge, practices, and language socialization patterns within children's families and communities contribute to children's ability to function in the classroom.

The personality of children is developed in both the preschool and at home by acting on their sensitivity and their realization of the role played in society towards the formation of a pro-ecological attitude (Shumow, 2002; Moll, 1994).As explained by Moll (1994), and Daniels and Shumow (2002) the ecological systems theory of education of children at pre-school age depends on the consciously intended activity (aimed, planned, systematic and gradual) in relation to the children and with their active participation. The ecological system theory of preschool children education is one of the principal domains of their fundamental and basic general education. In ecological system theory of

education, children master the principles of knowledge about the human environment, particularly about the changes in which it comes about under the influence of human activity.

According to ecological system theory, learning is not exclusive to the domain of an education system. Learning begins a very long time before school; continue for even longer after school; and happens rapidly and in parallels with school, in a greater number of different ways and settings. Children are naturally curious about their surroundings and they have interests in exploring and investigating to see how things work and why things happen (Daniels & Shumow, 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Children require, teachers guide through an important transition and oversee their adjustment and education focuses on “learning through play” by providing a hands-on, interactive atmosphere where children learn about themselves through playing with other children safe designing and arranging convenient environments for young children in their learning and development. This theory also will help to explore practically the relationships between pre-schools and parents relationships in development and education of pre-school children. In addition, children of preschool age are learning to learn and they are capable of learning a great deal in an environment that helps them and make meaningful connections across all the domains of development. In this study each perspective is important to guide ECE and curriculum implementation in relation to children’s learning and development; however, neither perspective is sufficient to explain learning or development. Therefore, in this study the theories that have been mentioned allows for the exploration of a broad spectrum of children learning and development in the process of ECE provision and curriculum implementation.

Summary

The maturational theory believes that development is a biological process that occurs automatically in predicable, sequential stage over time. This perspective led many educators and families to assume that young children will acquire knowledge naturally as they grow physically and become older, provided that they are healthy. However, the new paradigm of the sociology of childhood aligns itself with the constructivist perspective and seems the child as a biological entity that development is constructed solely from the systems the child is growing.

Today, development is viewed as the result of an interactive, transactional process between the growing, changing individual and his or her experiences in the social and physical worlds. Vygotsky believed in the close relationship between learning and development, and in the socio-cultural nature of both that a child's development depends on the interaction between a child's individual maturation and a system of symbolic tools and activities that appropriates for the child from his or her socio-cultural environment

On the other hand, behavioral theory of a child's development focus on how environmental interaction influences behavior and are based upon the theories of the theorists such as John B. Watson, Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner. These theories deal only with observable behaviors. Hence, observable behaviors are considered as most important on child development. This theory differs considerably from other child development theories because it does not consider internal thoughts or feelings and viewed children as passive recipients of knowledge. However, the cognitive development theory of Piaget set challenged the behaviorist approach which viewed children as passive recipients of knowledge by proposing a constructivist theory that valued discovery learning methods through practical activities.

The constructivist perspective of learning and development were advanced by theorists such as Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, and Lev Vygotsky. Even if their work varies, they are consistent in their beliefs that learning and development occur when children interact with the environment and people around them. Thus, the constructivist learning theory is the most effective and lasting learning when children are actively involved in constructing their own learning, when they are allowed to include their own interests in the activities that occur in the classroom and out of the classroom.

Vygotsky noted that the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is essentially stage of the learning process, when an individual child is unable to solve the problems alone, but needs interaction with more experienced peers or adults assist the child develops her/his potential. Therefore, in this study ZPD uses to explore regarding supports are given by the adults for the children in terms of guidance and environments that are conducive for the children learning and development.

The ecological systems theory was proposed by Bronfenbrenner and it explains how children develop within the context of their world. He described four systems that

influence a child development, micro system to macro system, and he considered that the person's biology also has contributed to this system. Thus, both environment and biological factors thought can shape development and child's learning outcome. In this study ecological systems theory guides to explore how informal and formal interactions of the stakeholders at preschool might be utilized to strengthen and build responsible social relation among families, community, government and nongovernmental sectors. Because in this study the researcher beliefs that this theoretical view demonstrates the substantial influences of environmental interactions on a children's learning and development. In general as discussed above this study was guided by the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner and Piaget cognitive and Vygotsky social constructive theories that helped the researcher to understand how ECE provision and curriculum implementation appropriate for the preschool children in line with children learning and development.

2.1.5. Supporting early childhood development by education

Learning is relatively permanent change in behavior that occurs over time as a result of experience and adults support. During the early childhood period children learn across the various dimensions of development. For example physical, motor, linguistic, emotional development is greater than at any other period, but is also highly changeable across the dimensions. As many researchers explained development also occurs very rapidly, is episodic in nature and is very susceptible to environmental conditions so that it needs support from different groups such as, parents, professionals among other groups (Bijou & Ribes, 1996; Evans, 2006).

Children development is not merely supported because of the passage of times, but because of particular meaningful experiences are being developed at an important age. In order to develop meaningful experiences children should get readiness skills. Many research results realized that training is important because a child must be ready, that is they possess the necessary prerequisite component skills and abilities to the advantage of this new experience (NAEYC, 2003; Rosales- Ruiz & Baer, 1996). Thus, development depends on the organization and sequence of learning practices in a given social or cultural setting.

When a learning event occurs; it produces particular outcomes, that outcome can also make the event more or less likely to be repeated in future settings. As described by Fitzgerald (2009) "Favorable out comes from perspective of the learner; make a learner over more likely to be repeated than events followed by unfavorable outcomes" (p.23). This means, the most valuable consequence to understand and use in teaching and learning environments is the reinforcer. It is also clearly described by the other researchers that events or circumstances that are favorable to the learner; some favorable outcomes include adding an event to the learner's environment and some include removing an event from their environment (Fitzgerald, 2009; Novak, 1996). According to the behaviorists these arrangements are called positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement, respectively. However, in both cases, the resulting situations must be something that learner prefers. The researchers also realized that learning and development occur when young children actively interact in the environment with objects and people around them with adults guidance because young children are active participants in the learning process (Pham, 2011; Bigge & Shermis, 2004). Children to learner actively, they need adults' support learning become powerful and lasting effect.

As stated by Novak (1996) development has distinct characteristics and it is a process that is dynamic. Thus, learning is ever changing, each new experience creating a new perceptive. Besides, early childhood practitioners document individual levels of knowledge and abilities as a basic for planning curriculum and they record the progress of development and learning over time, in order to ensure that the child is benefitting from favorable early childhood setting.

2.1.5. 1. Prerequisites of favourable early childhood learning and development

In order to attain the competencies level of children, it requires favorable support from adults based on children varied needs, because the needs of children vary child to child. Accordingly, Langford (2008) and Dunphy (2008) explained that learning environment should be attractive and playful for children's learning and development.

Regarding the children's learning and development the research study describes that the nature of early learning begins from the premise that in assessment early learning and development (Dunphy, 2008), it is critical to acknowledge and take account of the nature of early learning and development. It is also believed that the adults around the

child and the extent to which they can and do support early learning and development are crucial elements in determining the extent of learning. Accordingly, some principles that are related to children development and learning include:

- Holistic learning and development;
- Active learning;
- Play and first hand experiences;
- Relevant and meaningful experience;
- Communication and language;
- A well planned and well-resourced outdoor and indoor learning environment, and
- Integrated early childhood education

Researchers considered these principles as the prerequisite of favorable early childhood development and learning so that adults should plan and implement activities that are centered on meeting the unique needs of each and every child and family (Dunphy, 2008; Elliot, 2006). This explained that adults should plan learning activities based on children needs because each child has his/her own unique needs.

Early childhood development is shared responsibility among families that requires education, health and family services in order to meet intended learning and developmental goals. Accordingly, Moore (2007) and Bredekamp & Copple (1997) stated that an integrated approach is vital for early childhood development supporting strengths based flexible approaches and facilitating holistic responses for children and families. So this approach enables families to access multiple services for their children and themselves in an organized way. Thus, integrated approaches also seek to maximize the impact of different early childhood disciplines with a clear focus on the child, within the context of their family and community. An effective and attractive learning environment can create opportunity for children to interact with the existing spaces, materials and people (Marion, 1999). This means, when the learning environment is designed properly, children can move freely and safely with little intervention engages to investigate and develop experiences.

In the effective and attractive learning environment adults should concentrate on developing activities, observing children, and meeting their individual needs. Thus, effective environments help children feel invited and welcome to explore and learn (Elliot, 2006; Marion, 1999).

According to Olds (1979), quality learning environments should have an age-appropriate, child-centered curriculum:

- A variety of inviting equipment and play materials accessible to children;
- Sufficient and uncluttered space for active play with an additional welcoming space set aside for individual and quiet play;
- Many colorful photographs and pictures including the children's own art work displayed at their eye level and windows that provide natural light (p. 91).

Favorable situations promote children's learning and development, and motivate children to interact with their environment. It is believed that children develop and understanding of themselves developed through their interactions with events and materials outside themselves (Moore, 2007; Olds, 1979).

Assessment in early childhood education has a great potential to support learning and development. Study which was carried out in an early learning setting shows the importance of assessment in meeting children's needs and how it supports their cognitive progress (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). Hence, the ultimate purpose of assessment in early childhood is to make learning, more interesting enjoyable and successful for children. As Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell (2002) and Drummond (1993) suggested assessment works for children to shape enrich, curriculum, interactions, and education provision as a whole. Moreover, assessment is used for identifying what children will be able to learn next, adults support and extend children's learning and development. According to (UNESCO, 2014, p. 13) "assessment is part of adults' daily practices in striving for quality". Because of its importance for children learning, early learning settings and systematic evaluations to gather information on children's learning and development. The assessments and evaluation also facilitate reciprocal communication with parents and age sensitive to the cultural and community context of children's lives.

In general assessment in early childhood education can create favorable condition in the early childhood development and learning through observation and documentation of what children's experiences are and how they illustrate emerging developmental skills. That is, assessment are intended to identify, document, support and promote children's learning and suggests possible method of facilitating the documentation of child development.

2.1.5. 2. Risk factors of early childhood development and learning

As literature realized there are a range of factors that may contribute to a child or young person become at risk, at early age and disengaging from school. As the research study showed some of these risk factors are parents' socio-economic problems, education background and health among others (Greenman, 1988; Brooks-Gunn, 1990).

Research findings documented in the literature of early childhood development have describe risk as exposure to the biological and environmental conditions that increase the likelihood of negative developmental outcomes on children (Dunphy, 2008; Halpern & Myers, 1985; Brooks-Gunn, 1990). Other researchers strongly felt that biological risk factors affect negatively an individual development, such as prematurity, low birth weight, and perinatal complications (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). On the other hand environmental risk factors, like low socioeconomic status, adverse neighborhoods and poverty place children at increased risk for a host of problems, beginning at conception (Levine, 2005; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).The study carried out in the environment risk factors by Levine (2005) and Halpern & Myers (1985) describe how risk factors could affect the community that risk factor, often overlapping with community risk and health factors, is living in poverty.

Parents' education level is another risk factor to children's academic achievement, at least in part because of family norms and variation in parents to help children with challenging learning activities may affect children's learning and development. The research study shows that children living at homes without father may be at risk of poor achievement. These children are less likely to graduate in from high school, to attend college, and to perform well learning and developmental activities (Duncan, Klebanov & Brooks-Gunn, 1994).So that, to overcome such problems preschools should work hard developing preschool-parents relationships to support those children who come from parents of low education background.

Children abuse also adversely affect children's development and school performance. Researchers have found a strong relationship between abuse and neglect that affect children's learning and development and lead to academic failure (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Wolfe, 1998).With regards to children's early abuse and neglect the researchers identified that children early abuse and neglect can impair the development of

the brain, social/emotional development, especially speech and language development. For example, early abuse and neglect that children who are homeless often demonstrate significant developmental delays in early childhood, which can contribute to later behavioral and emotional problems and poor performance in school (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006; Wolfe, 1998). Besides, as many research described several health risk factors also put children at risk for poor school outcome later in life. Children with special need such as autism and developmental delays can have intensive learning and behavioral challenges (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Zigler & Styfco, 2001; Reynolds & Wolfe, 1997), for example, a child born with low birth weight may have a greater chance of developing learning disabilities and chronic health conditions such as asthma that can lead to increased school absences.

In addition, as many studies showed exposing to lead in children can cause brain damage and impair cognitive development, and contribute to anemia and kidney damage. It also leads towards delay physical growth and high level of exposure, even leads to death (Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Schwartz, 1991). Based on this, then there is a strong concern that children under such risk conditions meet difficulty to long live because their bodies are engaged in frequent hand to mouth and object to mouth activity. As pointed out by Kirkegaard, Obel, Hedegaard, & Henriksen (2006), exposures to second hand tobacco smoke is also harmful for children. Hence; second hand smoke puts young children at risk for respiratory illness and sudden infant death syndrome, middle ear infections impaired lung factor and asthma. Often the family and environmental risk factors, a child experiences are beyond the control of any one person. However, the effects of these factors can be moderated and this is where opportunities to promote children's positive mental health and well-being (Haffman, Mechlinger, & Kerivan, 2000; Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Examples of these family and environment risk factors may include:

- Family conflict;
- Unsupportive or neglectful relationships;
- Harsh or inconsistent parenting;
- Lack of supervision by adults;
- Family separation;
- Forced migration to a new state or country;
- Cultural and social isolation and

- Family financial difficulties.

The same authors (Haffman, Mechlinger, & Kerivan, 2000; Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Reynolds & Wolfe, 1997) explain that enhancing family and environmental protective factors means children are less likely to be vulnerable because they receive the acceptance, warmth and support required for their learning and development. That is, a focus on protective factors can make it easier for children to learn to understand, express and manage their emotions and behavior. In order to minimize at risk factors and to enhance family and environmental protective factors effectively, professionals, parents, community and government should work collaboratively.

2.1.5. 3. Role of health in the early childhood development and learning

Health is crucial issue and prerequisite for the children's healthy development and learning because health and education have very close and interdependent relationships. Many research have suggested that health is more than merely the absence of disease, it is an evolving human resource that helps children and adults adapt to the challenges of everyday life resist infections, cope with adversity, feel a sense of personal well-being and interact with their surrounding in ways that promote successful development (Myers and Robinson, 2007; Hertzman, 2003; UNESCO, 2002; Krieger, 2001). Regarding the healthy developmental need of children, science tells that meeting the developmental needs of young children is as much about building a strong foundation for lifelong physical and mental health as it is about enhancing readiness to succeed in school (Shonkoff, Boyce & McEwen, 2009). That is, the importance of viewing a broad array of policies and programs beyond the provision of medical services as potentially important vehicle for reducing the social burdens, human capacity impairment in the adult years.

Human infants are unique among all species in their prolonged period of extreme dependence on adult care and protection for their survival and healthy developments. The education that children receive, whether from parents, extended family members, neighbors or professionals preschool teachers lays the ground work for the development of a wide range of basic biological process that support emotion regulation, attention and ultimately all psychosocial functions (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers & Robinson, 2007).

Research has suggested that there are very close, complex and interdependent relation exist between education and health (Krieger, 2001). This interdependency of

health and education could provide bases for the achievement of emotional and academic goals in education program. As explained by Landry (2005) and Hertzman (2003) children's health includes nutrition physical development, chronic illness, stress and mental health that profoundly affect their school readiness. However, many of the illness and disabilities and associated lifestyle emerge in adult life have their roots in early life including. Many researchers (Landry, 2005; Hertzman, 2003; UNESCO, 2002) state that positive experiences in early childhood such as exposure to appropriate education and developmental practices positively influences the degree of later successes in literacy and numeracy. These are important skills at early years enhancing the quality of early childhood care and education as well as its related individual gains in health over the life course can extended to subsequent generations.

Clearly a child's survival and growth is necessary and occurs through the provision of proper health and nutritional care. The adequacy of the care will determine physical growth and greatly influence how a child navigates (finds the way) the learning process. Through these processes children learn about themselves and the environment around them. Learning and growth do not occur separately but rather are thoroughly integrated parts of a complicated process (UNESCO, 2002). Another research suggests that a very close, complex and interdependent relationship exist between education and health, this relationship has implications across development with early childhood setting the direction for the "life trajectory path of how education and health will interface for a given individual" (Landry, 2005, p.62). Thus, a healthy child learns more effectively than less healthy children, and a child who does well in school.

This interdependency of health and education means that both health care providers and educators are well advised to attend children's developmental goals (Landry, 2005; Hertzman, 2003). Therefore, positive interdependent relationships that existed between education and health could promote children's cognitive, social, emotional development, and play a great role for the later healthy life of the children.

Parents' role in favorable children development and learning

Research findings documented in the literature explained that the most essential goal and primary responsibility of parents is ensuring their child will remain alive healthy, and able to mature into a childhood herself, their survival is considered likely to

(Urdang, 2008; Levine, 1988) say that parents can help their children's development supporting the skills necessary for economic self-sufficiency through adulthood.

The role of parent and the related goals of parenthood are therefore imperative from birth onward. In child development literature, early parent child relationship have been cited is vital in supporting children as they work towards meeting their individual developmental plans, which has implications throughout the lifespan (Urdang, 2008, Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Davies, 1999). Another important issue in child development is that the quality of parent child relationships during those early years are critical because the presence of a warm, nurtured, responsive care giving will ensure the appropriate skills are developed with the idea of supporting self-sufficiency (Shankoff & Phillips, 2000). Regarding parent-child relationship the studies carried out by Kreider, 2002 and Urdang (2008) justified that a strong secure attachment during the early years could contribute for the greater skills development through adolescence and young adulthood. Parents are the primary caregivers who attend to the physiological needs of the child and foster social emotional development, strength their child's cognitive capacities and nurture other skills what will support the child's development and learning. So the nature of the parents' experience and parents' relationship with their child affect how the child develops and relates to other aspects of his/her environment.

2.1.6. History of preschool education

Historically preschool/kindergarten education was started in Europe in the 1700's to provide care for the children of workers at mills and fields. But the system of educational provision and pre-schools were largely copies of schools for older children (Manning, 2005). However, later on early childhood education dates back to the 1800's, when Friedrich Froebel founded the first kindergarten in Germany in 1837. His theories were highly disregarded because it was believed that children did not need to play in order to learn. As described by Brosterman (1997) Friedrich Froebel theory of child development maintained that childhood was a special phase in life. Later on his educational theories had spread to the western and eastern countries. For example, Kindertgartens were introduced into the USA.

Froebel coined the term kindergarten, which in German literally means "a garden for children." He believed that young children could be shaped and guided toward

positive outcomes from their earliest period in life. His theory emphasized that children learned largely through play. Research literatures have realized that young children should not be subjected to formal instruction, as were older children, but should learn through "self-activity" in play (Manning, 2005; Baader, 2004).

A famous name in the history of preschool education is Maria Montessori, a researcher in education theory. She began her studies of educational problems while working with culturally deprived and mentally deficient children and she had implemented her theories on children without disabilities. Within a few years, her methods had become world famous and Montessori schools were started in many countries. These include the recognition of multiple pathways to learning, the importance of concrete, or hands-on, learning, the stages of cognitive development in children, and the link between children's emotional development and their ability to learn at an optimal rate. Accordingly, many literatures described the basic Montessori theory was that children go through a series of phases during which they are particularly ready to learn certain skills, such as reading and arithmetic (Kamerman, 2007; McGill-Franzen, 2006; Baader, 2004). These theories use to influence practice and policy in early childhood education, and the historical background of early childhood education program also contributions to understand children's learning and development.

Preschool education: Preschool education embraces all formal and informal education before compulsory schooling starts. As described by Elliot (2006), it may include toddler programs, play school, nursery school; collectively known as pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. Pre-school education programs maintain a close relationship with the home and parents and are intended to introduce children to the social environment of school and concentrate on the basic skills of co-ordination. That is, preschools are the place where early childhood education program are provided for children before entering school during typical school time. As explained by (Friendly, 2009; Elliot, 2006) preschool programs might follow half-day and full-day attendance patterns particularly in preschools. In some countries preschools are private and independently operate, but are not for-profit concerns. For example, in the US there are several years of "schooling" prior to first grade. It is generally optional; in some districts

in a half-day program and most public school districts make kindergarten available for children within their district.

In Ethiopia for example, preschool education is the pre-school preparatory program for children, and can take up to three years (for the 3⁺-to- 6⁺ children). Typically in preschool program, children between the ages of four to six years are offered education that would enable them to express their feelings, to appreciate beauty, and to learn to distinguish and form letters and numbers (MOE, 2010), actually the program is mostly run by private, religious, NGOs and community and mostly they follow full-day program; however, the government involvement is low increased.

Preschool program aims to provide early developmental and educational activities to foster children's social and cognitive maturation, and to prepare them for school (Elliot, 2006). Generally, preschools are operated by different providers including school systems, not-for-profit community groups and profit-making businesses. Most preschools, other than those associated with public schools, charge fees.

Preschools are typically situated in local communities in dedicated, stand-alone buildings, often adjacent to schools or as part of school complexes. Sometimes, although less often than in the past, they share a space in a church or community hall that may also be used for other purposes (Elliot, 2006; Urban, 2009), for instance, **preschool education in Germany** is not part of the public education system, but the program is run for young children by churches or other non-profit organizations (Urban, 2006). Indeed, the federal government does provide some funding to the states, at least half-day childcare for children between the ages of one and three, and **Kindergarten** for age three to six; half-day or full-day.

In the developed countries, for instance, in US, preschool programs are typically run by several different groups and organizations. These groups and organizations include state programs for social services, health, and education, school districts, and family support programs (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2007; American Educational Research Association, 2005; Freeman and King, 2003), many of these programs are part-day or part-week programs. More programs are provided as full day care because of the increasing number of parents working (Friendly, 2009; Pascal, 2004). Thus, preschool may also allow mothers, fathers, or other caregivers to go back to part-time or full-time

employment. Nevertheless, such kinds of preschool programs do not implemented in many developing countries, such as Ethiopia.

As stated by the researchers (Friendly, 2009; Pascal, 2004),for children who previously have spent most of their time at home, kindergarten may serve the purpose of helping them adjust to being apart from their parents without anxiety. It may be their first opportunity to play and interact with a consistent group of children on a regular basis.

According to NAEYC (2009), preschool is a place where children expand their love of learning, their general knowledge, their ability to get along with others, and their interest in reaching out to the world. It is true that children attend preschool to learn to communicate, play, and interact with others appropriately. Teacher should also support children providing various materials to motivate children develop necessary basic skills such as language, arithmetic, and science, as well music, art, and social behaviors (NAEYC, 2009; Kagan & Lowenstein, 2004; karweit, 1992).

Preschool enable children to receive experiences that are believed to be educationally desirable, develop living experiences, intellectual learning activities, and creative constructional activities by the guidance of trained teachers. For this reason, early childhood education provision can be explained as the support for children's survival, growth, development and learning from birth to the time of entry in to the preschools (Woodhead, 2009; Nath, 2006). Early childhood education for preschool children can be organized in different school system to provide age appropriate education that enables them to promote social and cognitive development because children are naturally eager to learn. However, not all of them are ready for school, some children who are entering pre-school lag behind their classmates, and this disadvantage can affect them socially and academically long past preschool. Research findings documented in the literature of early childhood education have shown that children who have had the benefit of attending preschools are more comfortable in their surroundings, have been exposed to books, have learned how to play cooperatively, and are accustomed to learning with others (NAEYC, 2009;California Department of Education, 2008; NAEYC, 2003).

Many research findings showed that children engage to learn in adequate and interesting preschool settings. Such programs inspire children to be engaged in playful exploration and experimentation (Dickinson, 2006; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001). Thus,

in such a playful system children curious concrete, real, and relevant activities since learning is an interactive process. However, children who have missed preschool opportunity would miss benefits of developing adequate social emotional skills.

Therefore, preschool education as a system requires efforts that aimed at fostering physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of young children in order to provide them with a good start in formal primary education. A good start in primary school, in turn, increases the likelihood of favorable educational and social outcomes later in life.

2.1.7. The concepts of curriculum and method of preschool education

The term “curriculum” can have a variety of meanings in preschool programs, particularly in contrast to how the term is used in primary setting. This is due to in part the fact that curriculum is often heavily defined by the content to be taught, but theories of child development and learning are more likely to provide implications for how to teach, rather than what children should learn (Frede & Ackerman, 2007). On the other hand curriculum defined for the child with special educational needs in terms of the environment he or she experiences so as to minimize interferences that might hinder child’s learning opportunities in the classroom (Wilson, 1998), because environmental accommodations for children with special education needs may be influenced by the environmental factors such as the physical structure, the visual system, and the use of adaptive equipment and materials so that curriculum should be modified based on the children needs, interests and capacities.

An age appropriate preschool curriculum expected to be all-rounded, play-based, integrated, experiential, flexible, and contextual. It is well explained that the guiding principles of the early childhood education curriculum are: play as the basis of learning, art as the basis of education, recognition of the special features of children’s thinking, primacy of experience rather than expertise, experience of familiarity and challenge in everyday routines, mix of formal and informal interaction, use of local materials, arts, and knowledge (Frede & Ackerman, 2007; Manning, 2005; Baader, 2004). This means that curriculum includes daily schedules and routines, the physical environment, play materials, learning experiences, and, most importantly, the people who are part of the early child development setting.

Early childhood education program is designed and delivered to meet all children's full range of needs, cognitive, emotional, social and physical developments. However, these needs are very different from those of school-age children. Research indicates that the early years are the most formative in children's lives (Lee & Hayden, 2009). Therefore, the foundations of their main habits and patterns for their entire lives are established at this stage. Among the key features, the preschool curriculum is expected to be appropriate to the child's level of development, which from child development theory is technically referred as scaffolding. Thus, the concept of curriculum described based on the curriculum perspectives which are theories of knowledge that serve as important sources of curriculum decisions (COL, 2000).

Bowe (2000) described that to enhance the development of the child, the teacher should attend to assess, and intervene in all five domains: the adaptive, cognitive, communication, physical, and social/emotional domains. The environments which allow all children to be included easily and naturally convey a powerful message about human values. Preschool physical environment can play an important role in creating inclusive settings and meeting the needs and interest of all preschool children including children with disabilities. In order to provide quality education for all children, teachers should make sure the availability of special equipment, supervision related to those equipment and adaptations in the physical learning environment because young children use their hands frequently to learn and to explore the physical environment in which they are living and learning (Bailey & Wolery, 1992; Allen & Schwartz, 1996).

Class size and teacher-child ratios might determine the effectiveness of the early childhood education curriculum implementation. For instance, the class size in United States of America for preschool children accommodates fifteen children with a full-time assistant while legally determined class size in Ethiopia is forty, thus, large class size may affect preschool curriculum implementation.

Preschool education lays the foundation for lifelong learning and influences the later development and learning of young children. It is also clearly explained that a quality experiences in the preschool years are foundation to make difference in the future learning of children (Heckman, 2008; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). So, in order to thrive in a fast changing world

and be ready to take on the challenges of the future, children should be equipped with the necessary competences for learning and living in the 21st century.

The understanding of who children are, what they are capable of and how they learn shapes the classroom practice of teachers. This has an impact on how effectively they scaffold and extend the children's thinking and learning. It would also enable "teachers to make informed decisions to plan and facilitate meaningful learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom" (MOE, 2000, p. 25). The most important aspect of quality curriculum in preschool education is stimulating and facilitating for the children learning and development.

Children are active learners; they learn by doing, learning is more effective when children are actively engaged in the learning process. Thus, children are more likely to understand and remember skills and concepts learnt through participation, exploration and experimentation involving real life objects and experiences. They will be able to create the mental structures that help them to construct knowledge of the world (Dodge 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). In many countries, early childhood programs follow a specific curriculum framework, but they have a great deal of freedom for flexibility in designing experiences that reflect their children and the community. For example, in New Zealand, early childhood centers use a curriculum framework called "TeWharki," meaning "a Woven mat". It defines four principles: family and community, relationship holistic development, and empowerment, and five strands; wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration. As described by Dodge (2004, p.72) each center creates its own "Woven mat" from the basic principles and guidelines of framework.

On the other hand, creative and High/Scope curriculum models are well known in USA in early childhood education program. The High/Scope curriculum advocates active learning and classrooms that are arranged with separate, well-equipped interest areas (Lunenburg, 2011; Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002). This means, each day children could be engaged in learning activities and routines that consists of time for children to plan, carry out, and reflect on their own learning as well as time to engage in small-and-large group activities, and learning with adult in the well-organized environment supports children to experience world around them.

Creative and High/Scope curriculum models also use other curriculum models and resources to supplement their planning. For example, Reggio Emilia, Montessori and what several called “emergent curriculum” (Dodge, Colker, & Herman, 2010), criteria that programs use to select curriculum resources include:

- Clearly written;
- Allow teachers to design a program that is responsive to individual and group needs and characteristics;
- Contain a parent involvement component; and
- Address outcome and states expectations(p.1)

For example, creative curriculum balances teacher-planned and child-initiated learning emphasizing responsiveness to children’s strengths, interests, needs and learning styles. Therefore, whatever their levels of experiences, teachers could find the support they need to offer appropriate learning experiences for all the children in their classrooms children with different needs including children with disabilities and advanced learners.

2.2. Early childhood education and children with disabilities

Children with disabilities have special needs that require particular accommodations and adaptations. In order to serve children with disabilities, preschool must provide appropriate learning environment and teachers should individually assist each child to move along a pathway of healthy learning and development (Riojas-Cortez, 2001;National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007) creating preschool-parent strong relationship.

The future of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. Hence, today’s children will become tomorrow’s citizens, workers, and parents. Investing wisely in children and their families, help the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. However, a country which overlooked to create opportunities for the healthy development and wellbeing of the children at early years childhood, will meet difficulties to have productive citizens. As argued by National Research Council, 2001 when a country fails to provide children with what they need to build a strong foundation for healthy and productive lives, the country put its future prosperity and security at risk.

However, there has been a great debate concerning starting time of early education for young children. Accordingly, (Ejeh, 2006; National Research Council, 2001) are claiming that growth and development starts at birth or even during the prenatal

period because it minimize children not exposed for at risk condition. Regardless of the earliest starting point, scientists who carry out brain development research have at least agreed with one key finding that learning during the early years is critical for the children healthy learning and development. The consensus seems to be that early exposure to learning experiences in a stimulating environment will contribute for the children social development, especially children with disabilities (Riojas-Cortez, 2001; UNESCO, 2006). It can be argued that if early childhood education is provided for preschool children with disabilities starting from the early years, they would be more productive, and helps to live independently in their future life. Moreover, it can minimize the long-term effect of varying abilities, including those with or at risk of developmental delay or other problems.

Today, early childhood has moved closer towards being in the global policy more attention than ever before. The research carried out by UNESCO (2006) demonstrates that the earliest years of a child's life is a crucial period of biological, neurological, psychological, social and emotional growth and change. However, children with disabilities have many challenges that can be attributed to the absence of enabling developmental domains. For example, the deprived resources and services would influence the access of education that contributes to their fullest development.

Although providing preschool education for children with disabilities in Ethiopia is current policy issue (MOE, 2010), still preschool education is not practically implemented on the ground because of people awareness problems towards education of children with disabilities. Although the earliest years of children's are complicated with disadvantages or in some respects irreversible on the child development, well-planned early education or intervention can have possible outcome to overcome at risk condition fostering mutual sustaining relationships among preschools, parents and the community. Therefore, respecting for diversity, equity and inclusion should be prerequisites for optimal development and learning for all children including children with disabilities/special needs.

2.3. The role of physical learning environment in ECE

The physical environment can play an important role in the early childhood education. Thus, carefully planned and knowingly arranged outside and inside classroom

physical environment can add a significant dimension for the children's learning and development. As it mentioned earlier, an appropriate physical environment creates suitable situation for children social and physical development. When preschool physical environment clearly become child-oriented, inclusive, and comfortable children with child-level and child-size equipment and play materials children are interested to engage in learning and developmental activities. Accordingly, many research study results clarify the benefits of appropriate physical learning environment in early childhood education are described that in all respects, the physical learning environment is a resource for supporting and encouraging self-expression, and social interaction among the children (Berris & Miller, 2011; Moore, 2002; Kagan & Lowenstein, 2004).

Moreover, thoughtfully designed physical environment can support the activities that planned for preschool children in a curriculum so as to promote their learning and development. Researchers realized that curriculum philosophy of a preschool has connection to the physical environment. For example, a physical environment that is full of the available age appropriate play materials and toys, motivate children to play freely individually and with others according to their needs and interests (Garvey, 1990; Curtis & Carter, 1996; Moore, 2002. It is also believed that conducive physical learning environment enhances and supports children's ability to do something himself/herself, take care of herself/himself, initiated to complete activities, take control of her/his own actions and responsibilities, communicate and interact with others easily, and have better perceptual and motor skills (Inan, 2009; Ryan and Adams, 1995 as cited in White, 2000; Moore, 1987).

Similarly other researchers described that children learning and development can be influenced by the inappropriate physical learning environment such as shortage of infrastructure, unavailability of play materials, equipment and spaces as well as lack of trained staffs (White, 2000; Marion, 1999). It is true that without appropriate physical learning environment, it is difficult to provide quality preschool education for children so that children before going to play, teachers should check appropriateness of the equipment and materials because children use their hands frequently to learn and to explore the environment in which they are living and learning (Bailey & Wolery, 1992; Allen & Schwartz, 1996). In doing this teachers can prevent materials from damage and

children from accident and help children to use appropriately maintained play materials. As Lawton (1999) as cited in Inan (2009) the physical environment distinction between the objective physical environment and the subjective physical environment was made. Accordingly, objective physical environment is described:

The objective physical environment is all that lies outside the skin of the participant, is inanimate and may be specified by counting or by measuring in centimeters, grams, or seconds (p 56).

Theoretically, everything in objective environment is observable and potentially capable of exact measurement. For example, chairs, toys, books, windows, rugs are parts of the objective physical environment (Berris & Miller, 2011, Inan, 2009). Understanding objective environments is central to making decisions about children's education programs so that supportive learning environment of the preschool might promote children's social interactions, self-esteem and sense of confidence. Negative effects may occur if the physical environment is not planned thoughtfully. Hence, if the classroom is poorly designed and planned, it will not support children's learning and social development.

Adequate physical and social environment can play a significant role for the children's holistic development. Although physical learning environment have strong impact on children's development, it is not related only the materials and equipment but also to how these are placed, the environment is organized, its attractiveness, how much and what kind of noise there is and how much the environment change or stay the same (Curtis, 2001; Driscoll, 2003; Stonehouse, 2010). The learning environment in this context comprises of social environment like the children, the teachers and the curriculum or program, and the physical environment such as buildings and infrastructure. Accordingly, the research finding realized that supportive learning environment establishes the learning and development opportunities into both the educational program and the physical form itself (Abbas, Othman, & Rahman, 2012).

Both outdoor and indoor physical environment that are well-designed and well facilitated could allow children to explore, experience with less control of teachers; encourage children to engage in self-directed play activities. Besides, well-designed and facilitated physical environment foster children to build strong relationships among their peers and with adults because physical environment and children's cognitive

development and social competency have direct relationships (Moore, 2002; Curtis & Carter, 1996; Moore, 2002). Another researcher also confirmed that interesting outdoor and indoor preschool learning environment have positive impacts on children physical, cognitive, social and emotional development and learning (Acar, 2014). Of course children need access to a wide array of well-organized space, play materials and equipment which help them to promote such developmental domains. Hence, well facilitated supportive physical environment encourage children develop new and challenging experiences and ensure children's learning and development. In addition, other researchers justified the importance of the physical learning environments for children learning and development that are well-designed and facilitated would allow children to explore experience and experiment their environment and give them a sense of control and allow the children to be engaged in focused, self-directed learning and play activities (Martlew, Stephen, & Ellis, 2011; Penn, 2002).

Similarly, the research results confirmed that stimulated physical environment of the classroom encompasses a broad range of educational concepts, including safety and facilities, classroom sizes, seating arrangement, materials arrangements, displays and spaces and numerous instructional components that can facilitate curriculum implementation (Acar, 2014; Berris & Miller, 2011; Moore, 2002). In contrast, if the classroom is poorly designed and planned, it will limit children's free movements and play activities, and it may make children to be inattentive and frustrated during academic learning activities (Wolery, 2004; Moore, 2002). Therefore, inside and outside classroom preschool physical learning environment should be attractive, well designed and facilitated with age appropriate play materials and equipment so as to promote children's physical and social development.

2.4. Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia

Traditionally, in Africa children are prepared to contribute to strengthening parents and the community. Thus, children are expected to acquire skills essential for protection, and mastery of the environment (Garcia, Pence, & Evans, 2008). Concerning early education, similar researchers state that missionary teachers brought ideas for infant schools (for ages two to six) to Africa that reflected the dominant early childhood development program of the time. Missionary school established in Africa in the 19th century and the preschool model for settler children varied over time, beginning with the

infant school and later adding idea from the kindergarten. Besides, in the 20th century preschools were established by NGOs or missionaries; however, today in many African countries government contribution for preschools education increased. For example, in 2005 more than 1.5 million children aged 3 to 6 years old enrolled in preschool in Sub Saharan Africa. However, today each country may have different figures for preschool coverage: for example, Kenya has GER of 38%, Sudan 22%, Gambia 28%, Ethiopia 1.7%, and the average GER for sub-Saharan Africa at preschool level was estimated to be only 10.3% (Garcia, Pence and Evans, 2008; UNESCO, 2006; Woodhead, 2006).). It is from these points of view, possible to argue that the gross enrollment rate for Ethiopia was the least when compared to the Sub-Saharan Africa countries, but MOE Annual Abstract 2018 reports showed the preschool Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) is 49.5%.

However, historically believed that in Ethiopian, Orthodox Church had established a comprehensive system of education for young men so as to prepare for the service of the Orthodox Church as the priests but the church has played a limited role in offering of education for young children (Tirussew, 2005; MOE, 2010; Habitamu, 1996). Beginning in the mid-eighties there was a growing interest in establishing community sponsored pre-school which somehow brought an increase in the number of preschools all over the country.

As justified by Tirussew (2005) the nature of the traditional educational system, which has been predominantly oral, was influential in facilitating the inclusion-accepting a children with and without disabilities and children usually begin to go to traditional priest schools 'orthodox churches at age 4 four', especially children with physical and visual problems (Tirussew, 2005). This long standing practice considered as a start for these days modern early children education. Nevertheless, modern education in Ethiopia directly related to the beginning of foreign missionaries in the country (MOE, 2010; Tirussew, 2005), they opened school and institutions in the place where they accepted specially in the eastern and southern parts of the country. The Ethiopian, Education and Training Policy of 1994 encompass overall and specific objectives, implementation strategies including formal and non-formal education from kindergarten to higher education and special education needs. However, pre-school education is not still recognized as a compulsory.

Formally, compulsory education in the country starts at the age seven in primary schools. However, children are expected to join preprimary schools between ages three and six depending on the availability of the program in their community. Thus, early childhood education is structured in the form of kindergartens predominantly provided by the private sector, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), communities and faith-based or religious organizations. As described by MOE (2009) and Tassew (2011).The government has a very limited intervention on this regard so that Ethiopia is mentioned as the only country with no official program targeting children under the age of three years (UNESCO, 2008). Although now the government formally recognized preschool education as a sector catering for children aged three plus to six plus years, the government involvement in preschool education is still less far.

2.4.1. Early education systems and policy in Ethiopia

The UN convention on the rights of the child (CRC) adopted by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) in December 1991. This convention has relation to the child's right for education. Accordingly, the government committed to provide preschool education that is focused on all round development of the child in preparation for formal schooling in an integrated manner (MOE, 2010;UNESCO, 2006; TGE, 1994).Current national policy framework and strategic operational plan and guidelines for early childhood care and education (MOE,2010) gives more emphasis to the continuity of community based preschool to promote high quality mother/caregivers-child interaction and parents getting their children ready to go school at the right age. This policy also gives special consideration children obtain age appropriate education through the joint involvement of teacher-parent in order to support children's learning and development.

Accordingly, the government recognized integrated early childhood policy that covers the period from prenatal up to the primary school. According to this policy preschool/kindergarten (4 to 6+ years) program caters for the acquisition of basic skills (pre-reading, pre-writing, counting and arithmetic) in preparation for the child's formal schooling considered as the focus area. However, in the national preschool curriculum guide learning and developmental activities are organized into three levels: nursery/prekindergarten, lower kindergarten and upper kindergarten. Thus, all private, religious, community and NGOs preschools are implemented accordingly.

Early childhood education (ECE), which was formerly called pre-primary education, includes kindergartens, non-formal pre-school services, and “O” level or zero classes. As it has been mentioned before, in Ethiopia kindergartens are predominantly operated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), communities, private institutions, and religious organizations, while non-formal preschool program is being delivered mainly through the child-to-child initiatives. On the other hand “O” level or Zero classes are an initiative of the government, and serve children age six who are not enrolled for ECE. In general the government introduced “O” classes and child-to-child/child-friendship programs aimed to prepare children for the primary education.

2.4.2. Access for early childhood education

As it has been mentioned earlier the government involvement in Ethiopia, intervention in ECE is low even though involved in developing curriculum and providing supervisory support. However, children enrollment rate in preschools are increasing yearly, despite the fact that underreporting remains a persistent issue in the preschools (Ministry of Education Educational Statistics Annual Abstract, 2015).

It is believed that the enrollment rates in preschool program are in progress, because investment in preschool program is increased. However, access of preschool education for children with disabilities and rural community is almost insignificant. Children without disabilities in urban communities had been attended pre-school at some point since the age of 3 years (Tassew, 2011; Yisak, Workneh,&Asham , 2009; Woodhead, 2009; Hoot, Szente, & Mebratu, 2004). Although currently the government of Ethiopia formally recognized to provide preschool education for all children aged three plus to six plus (MOE, 2010) still the government intervention is low.

As the result of the government’s limited intervention, enrollment rate for preschool education has remained very low, especially in rural areas of the country. Accordingly, Tassew (2011) and UNESCO (2008) justified that those children who are from parents of low socio-economic background enter primary school at age seven without early years background. That is, majority of children are enrolled to primary education without having any exposure to preschool program. As a result, they are challenged to compete with those children who are coming with the preschool education background.

As the research results have confirmed in contrast with rapidly growing primary enrolment rate of children, growth at pre-school level is limited and much slower with an increase in coverage of only 2% between (UNESCO, 2008). Other research findings also realized that along with scarce access to early childhood education, lack of qualified teachers have its own contribution for the low access of preschool education (Hoot, Szente, & Mebratu, 2004 as cited in Woodhead et al., 2009). Moreover, mothers' and fathers' own education levels are associated significantly not to send children to the preschool. As many researchers justified family size and birth order have played significant factors children not to get preschool education opportunities. For example, households with more children are less likely to send their children to private preschool, even later born children are least likely to get preschool opportunity than first born children in Ethiopia (Woldehanna, Mekonnen, & Alemu, 2008; MOE, 2010). This is perhaps linked partly to pre-school costs and to the availability of care from older siblings. Of course, in Ethiopia, private pre-schools have some extent filled some gap, but they benefit only the most advantaged urban people who are able to pay education fee.

The survey research result that have carried out in Ethiopia confirmed that the existing urban based early childhood education do not open door for children with disabilities; however, to obtain available information on early childhood education activities in the country is not well documented (Tirussew, Teka, Belay, & Demeke, 2009). Although this study did not included Gedeo zone or Dilla town; however, this study will explore the access of the preschool education for all children including children with disabilities.

2.4.3. Curricula and early childhood education in Ethiopia

Early childhood education curriculum is not a list of topics that need to be taught or activities that have to be completed. As describe by Shipley (2008) preschool curriculum is a way that teachers design interaction, relationship, environments and experiences to create learning opportunities.

In Ethiopia, Ministry of Education (MOE, 2010) developed national integrated play-based curriculum based on the national preschool policy framework. Thus, the document clearly described what types of teaching-learning approaches would be followed in preschools. Accordingly, "children learn through play in an informal

environment at their own pace” (MOE, 2010, p.14). It also clarifies that play encourages the child to engage in learning voluntarily, experimenting and making their own discoveries either independently or with other children and adult supports. Of course, play can promote self-care, self-expression and social interaction when play materials and equipment are available in the barrier free learning environment (MOE, 2010; MOE, 2009). In order to promote children’s learning and development curriculum activities should be prepared in line with the children’s needs and age levels because each child is unique and learn differently at different pace so that teachers need to be sympathetic to each child’s interest and needs avoiding ‘a blanket ‘approach.

Since children are curious to explore and experiment their environment, adults should understand the rich opportunities of learning in many areas of the curriculum within one activity. For example science, mathematics, language and social skills can be learnt during a creative arts and motor skills development (MOESAA, 2015; MOE, 2010). However, children require experiencing the relevance of their world before they separate themselves from it and begin to analyze it in a detached way.

According to the national early childhood education curriculum framework (MOE, 2010), there are five specific approaches in facilitating early education curriculum. Four of them are described as follows:

- Children learn through free and facilitated play-such as sports, dance, music, visual arts and role-play;
- Use mother tongue as a medium of instruction and for storytelling;
- Using hand-on activities with a creative approach facilitating open –ended project with a focus on the process rather than final product thus allow the child to experiment and discover independently;
- Teaching an integrated curriculum where all areas of learning are learnt together (p.15).

As mentioned in the national curriculum framework (MOE, 2010), theintegrated preschool curriculum consists of the following learning areas:

- Taking care of myself: children explore themselves, their body parts
- My environment: children are always eager to know more about their environment
- Developing literacy: encouraging children to develop basic communication and interaction with adults
- Developing numeracy: develop the concepts of space, quantity, size and number
- Relating with others: children need to have relationships and feel a sense of belonging (PP.16-17)

The framework also gives special emphasis adults take responsibilities when they plan curriculum activities for children. That means; teachers can adapt the curriculum based on the children needs, interest, capacity and experience that help them to meet learning outcomes.

Play is the first and most important defined behavior of a young child in the document. Many research results justified that play cannot be replaced by any other activity (MOE, 2009, Bodrova & Leong, 1996;Vandell & Powers, 1983) because play enhances all area of development in young children. For example, dramatic play helps children to develop language communication skills and identify variety of societal roles. So play has so many benefits for the children learning and development. Other researchers also justified in relating to play-based curriculum that when children engaged in different play curriculum activities, they learn problem solving and scientific concepts that help them to express and control emotion, and it has also play an important role in learning physical and perceptual skills (MOE, 2010;Shipley, 2008; Gullo, 1992; Sponseller, 1974).

Even if preschool curriculum models are varied, literatures described that a preschool classroom with a planned curriculum has a more positive impact on child outcomes than one with no set curriculum (MOESAA, 2015, MOE, 2010). It is believed that young children tend to learn more and be better prepared for formal schooling when they attend well planned, high-quality preschools in which curricular aims are specified and delivered (MOE, 2009; NAECS,2003).Thus, thoughtfully planned, challenging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, preschool curriculum likely promote to positive outcomes.

As stated by MOE (2010; 2009; 2005), play is an integral part of a curriculum and methodology to facilitate learning and development in the early years. It is true that at early age children expected to be engaged in language skills, numbers, life skills, art, and music developments mixed with indoor and outdoor play. Therefore, curriculum is the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect that occurs within an environment that is designed to foster children's learning and development.

2.4.4. Preschool teacher education

In Ethiopia preschool program is known as preprimary preparatory education program for children and it can take up to three years including prekindergarten, non-formal pre-school service (child-to-child) and ‘O’ classes. As stated by the MOE (2010) and MOE (2005) preschool teachers are capable enough to plan and provide curriculum activities that enable children to express their feelings, to appreciate beauty, and to learn to distinguish and form letters and numbers. Accordingly, teachers have responsibility to adapt curriculum according to their preschool context so as to promote all-round development of the children. Generally, teachers are expected to be empathic, well-trained and talented.

It is clearly described in the document that the goal of preschool teachers training is to create capable teachers that have enthusiasm to support children to explore and experience world around them (MOE, 2010). In order to meet this goal, teachers’ competence is a critical issue for effective utilization of preschool education and to employ lots of methods children learn according to their capacity, interests and needs. However, teachers’ competence can be achieved through adequate training and experiences. This is because the courses are given in preschool have a complex nature that requires a sound knowledge and skill on the parts of teachers. As described by Lillvist, Sandberg, Sheridan, & Williams (2014) suggested children development is an essential subject of study for everyone who works with young children so that teachers or other personnel who are working in preschool have to carefully trained and have sympathetic behavior.

Other researchers also described that preschool teachers should knowledgeable to understand what children need to growth and learn so as to reach pertinent level of competence (MOE, 2010; Bahous, 2006; Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992). Therefore, it is possible to justify Keeping in mind Vygotsky’s theory on learning and development teaching and learning, teachers can play an integral role in scaffolding a child’s learning by using varied teaching behaviors and strategies to gear the child toward exploration and understanding world around them. Besides, when one think of Piaget’s theory on learning, the context of the experience and an environment with many opportunities to

explore, teachers' support and play materials are fundamental to effective learning process.

In addition, early childhood teachers must develop specialized knowledge, skills, and practices to support children's learning and development. Accordingly studies that are carried out on teachers' development stated that systematic approaches based on the dynamics of teacher development could enhance the quality of professional development of early childhood teachers (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). However, the training programs that are focused on specific content such as early literacy and environment assessment do not necessarily support the processes of teacher development. So that teachers and other preschool personnel require opportunity to obtain trainings that help them to develop professionally and personally through in-service training.

Of course, preschool teachers training development is varied from country to country based on the curriculum framework and nature of the program that offered in the program. The survey study that carried out by UNESCO on 67 United Nations member countries justify these realities that in some countries there were no specified certification records other than completion of primary or secondary level because teachers development program is different depending on the countries context (UNESCO, 2008, 1985).

In the preschool education, teachers and administrators who have appropriate training in preschool education play a critical role in shaping next responsible generation developing consistent, compassionate, respectful relationships with children and their parents. Consequently, such relationships contribute children to establish strong foundation for lifelong learning. Many research conducted on preschool teachers education demonstrate that teachers who have preschool education background professionals help children to develop multiple developmental domains that are required children attain at early years (Samuelsson & Kagan, 2008; Woodhead 2006; Hoot, Szente, & Mebratu, 2004). Thus, preschool teachers should be capable enough through appropriate training to support children to attain holistic developmental needs for future learning and success in life.

Teachers who have adequately trained in ECE are capable to acts as a role model in the interaction of the activity with a large or small group of children. While considering materials, toys, furniture or other elements of the learning environment that the teacher wants to supply for children taking into consideration their both chronological developmental ages. For instance, a toy which is appropriate for typically developing children might not be appropriate for atypical children (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). The competent teacher could pay special attention for the children developmental ages while creating an appropriate learning environment, especially for preschool children with special needs.

Teachers with appropriate preschool education skills and knowledge could establish quality learning environment and help young children become successful in their learning and developmental activities. It is from this point of view that quality teachers' professional training, their interaction with preschool children can assist children to promote learning and development through interactive experiences such as language and social competence. The researchers argued that teachers would be capable social partners for scaffolding children's learning and social interaction in early childhood classrooms because quality of teacher-child interactions contributes significantly to children's development (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

As De Kruif and McWilliam (2000) and Bowman, Donovan, & Burns (2001) described the trained and competent teachers promote positive teacher-child interactions which develop children's ideas and conversations by asking open-ended and cognitively challenging questions, giving information related to child's engagement can extend children's ideas and conversations and facilitate language and cognitive development because teacher-child interaction has been used as an index of child education and care quality. Therefore, the way that teachers interact with children has direct relation to the teachers' training quality and then, the teachers interact with children in a warm, responsive and informative ways encourage children's learning and development.

2.5. Conceptual framework

The conceptual frameworks for this research are developed based on the research questions, literature review and theories. These are: 1) perception on roles and values

preschool education; 2) curricula practiced in preschools; 3) instructional strategies in the preschools; 4) physical environment and facilities; 5) challenges for children learning and development. The conceptual framework also highlighted as follows based on the objectives, research questions and theoretical perspectives.

Participants' perception and understanding of the role and value of preschool education could be supported by the constructivists' view that teachers' administrators and parents, perceptions and experiences could play a significant role reducing barriers for learning so as to access ECE opportunity for preschool children. Constructivists' theories focus on understanding and reconstructing the meanings that individuals hold about the phenomenon in which learning and developmental activities are being carried out (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009; Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Thus, preschool administrator/owner, teacher, parent and the education official participants understanding and perception about the role and values of ECE is indispensable so as to access education opportunities for all children. Accordingly, in consideration of integration of participant in the preschool education provision program, Bronfenbrenner (1979) presents a nested system of various levels of environment starting with the micro-systems at the innermost family circle through the meso-systems at the neighborhood level including school, and the exo-system covering the social setting to the macro-system level of cultural values, laws, policies and resources that all play vital roles in the children's learning and development. Each has either direct or indirect influences on a child's development. In this study these four levels of nested systems could play significant roles guides in the investigation of preschool education provision and curriculum implementation. Thus, in this study Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory helps to explore how informal and formal interactions of the administrators, teachers, parents and the community support in the process of ECE provision. Duncan, Bowden, & Smith (2006, p.3) also clearly described that social relation among families, community, and government and nongovernmental sectors develop responsibility in the process of preschool education/ECE.

Piaget and Vygotsky theories are influential in curricula development and implementation for early childhood education that they emphasized the play based learning, child-centered and age appropriate education practices as more important for the

children learning and development (Bowman & Donovan, 2000). The constructivist learning theory is the most effective lasting learning occurs when children are actively involved in constructing their own learning when they are allowed to include their own interests in the activities that occur in the classroom and out of the classroom (Hand & Nourot, 1999; Brooks and Brooks, 1999). This view revealed that children are active participants in constructing what they are learning through playing the facilitated learning environment and teachers also considered as the facilitator of the leanings. As a result, early childhood education curricula frameworks have incorporated play as a means of learning for children. This is consistent with the Vygotskian position that cognitive development is the result of the children participation in problem solving, together with a partner who can provide leadership and guidance within the activity. This process is a means for assisting, or scaffolding children and their learning (Copple, 2009, Morrison, 2006).

The concept of instruction for preschool children is considered as scaffolding for learning and development in the early years. As it has been mentioned earlier, scaffolding derived from Vygotsky's notion of the 'zone of proximal development', a zone that includes everything that is achievable with assistance that would not be lay beyond individual child capability. Vygotsky (1978) and Bodrova & Leong (1996) noted that the zone varies with culture, society, and experience but it must be fostered in joint activity that creates a context for child and adult interaction within a social context. As explained by Pham (2011) there is a strong relationship between learning theories and instructional practices. Effective learning could be carried out as a result of effective teaching strategies. This means that the effective teaching requires teachers to have understanding about the concepts of learning to provide efficient instructional combining theory with practice. The learning theories such as behaviorist, cognitivist, and constructivism, demonstrate how learning associated with certain types of instruction used to bring productive outcome. Each perspective is important in order to explore children's learning and development in this study; however, neither perspective is sufficient to explain learning or development. Today, development is viewed as the result of an interactive, transactional process between the growing, changing individual and his or her

experiences in the social and physical worlds (Ultanir, 2012; Pham, 2011; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

As pointed out by Ultanir (2012) the emphasis of the constructivist learning environment is a “knowledge construction environment, which supports active and collaborative learning” (p. 205). This means that children need an opportunity to construct their own learning in a conducive learning environment. The children's development in the developmental domains: social, physical, cognitive and emotional is being supported, sustained, extended and enhanced primarily through activities; the instructional materials, equipment, interpersonal relationships and daily routines in the purposefully designed learning environment (Acar, 2014, NAEYC 2009). Educational theorists and practitioners have always recognized the importance of physical space in an early learning environment. It is argued by Piaget and Montessori that a child's environment is crucial to their development and that learning environments should be rich in stimuli, providing opportunity for exploration and experiencing (Moore, 2002; Moore, 1987).

A supportive learning environment is created through the interaction of the indoor and outdoor physical environment because the physical environment has a strong impact on children's learning and development. Accordingly Kagan& Lowenstein (2004) notes that physical environment plays an important role in the children learning and development, it is a resource for supporting and encouraging self-expression, interaction, and creates opportunities for the children to be involved in play activities (Kagan& Lowenstein, 2004). Research also indicates that children learn best in an environment that allows them to explore, discover and play (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Moore, 2002; Curtis, 2001). Thoughtfully designed physical environment is crucial for the preschool curriculum implementation. The curriculum philosophy of a preschool is connected to the physical learning environment that facilitated with age appropriate play materials and equipment could help children to play individual and with others (Moore& Sugiyama, 2007; Curtis & Carter, 2005). Therefore, children construct knowledge through their own exploration in the physical world; while adult play an active role in constructing convenient physical learning environment and facilities that could encourage children learning by using their natural curiosity to explore world around them. As mentioned

earlier, this study was mainly guided by the constructivist theory of Piaget cognitive developmental and Vygotsky social constructive theories, and ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner to investigate a broad spectrum of ECE provision and challenges in the curriculum implementation.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology. The methodology is the philosophy or general principle which guides the research. In a qualitative research the central philosophical assumptions are based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals as they interact in their social worlds (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2010). As described by Stake (2010), "...a qualitative...research relies primarily on human interpretation and understanding" (p. 11). However, qualitative research method is a technique that includes interviews, observations, document analysis among other tools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Dawson, 2002). Thus, research method deals with techniques of gathering and analyzing data. Accordingly, the methodology used in this study was qualitative research in the form of case studies.

Qualitative research might be characterized as empirical and interpretive. Accordingly Stake (1995) described that qualitative research is empirical in that it is naturalistic (field oriented), focusing on things that are observable and information received from informants, and it is also interpretive in that researchers rely more on facts, and the researcher-subject interaction is a part of the research. It is believed that qualitative research methods are known to be appropriate and effective when little or nothing is known about the phenomenon, as they do not require a predictive statement and therefore, seek the answers to open questions (Yin, 1994; Stone, 1999; Roux, 2002). For these reasons the qualitative case study approach is suitable in order to explore in-depth problems and to obtain rich information using *Why*, *How* and *What* questions about the real life of the people and situations which are not known and need to be investigated (Creswell, 2012; Creswell, 2005; DeVaus, 2002). Therefore, the researcher belief that qualitative case study approach is appropriate to implement in this dissertation research to explore participants' perceptions and understanding about the roles and values of ECE, preschool education provision, appropriateness of the curriculum used in preschools and challenges, adequacy of physical learning environment for children learning and development.

3.1.1. Research design

As mentioned before, qualitative case study approach was employed as the main strategy for this study. Qualitative case study design used to explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of existing preschool education practices. According to Merriam (1998), a qualitative case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved. The interest is in “process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998, p.19). Qualitative study focuses on extracting available information from real situations. As Creswell (2007) noted a qualitative case study is the optimal approach for conducting an in-depth analysis of one or more cases in a bounded system. The case being studied is bounded by certain parameters such as participants, location, time (e.g. time allowed for data collection), and place (e.g. one of the places for data collection was the classroom in the preschool settings).

Regarding more practical approach of the qualitative case study, Patton (2002) described the process of constructing case studies and depicts the procedure as the process of organizing data by specific cases using all available data collection strategies. For example, observation, document analysis, interview, and field notes including contextual information about a phenomenon. Therefore, a multiple case study design to collect data from multiple sources in order to gain an in-depth understanding in this study because of its ability to investigate ECE provision and barriers in curriculum implementation in the preschools, as well as to explore instructional strategies that were employed in the preschool natural context and classrooms.

Case study

Case study is defined by many researchers, such as Merriam (1988), Stake(1995), and Yin (2009). These researchers are the most prominent in case study research and all of them have written extensively about case study research. They have also clarified techniques to how case study research is effectively conducted and organized. Stake (1995) described case study method as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher used to explore in-depth information from a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time.

For this study, the phenomenon under investigation was preschool context that ECE is practiced.

Another definition of case study is the unit of analysis that defined as the focus area of the study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Accordingly, Yin (2009) identified five components of effective case study research design: (1) research questions; (2) purpose of study; (3) unit analysis; (4) logic that links data to purpose, and (5) criteria for interpreting finding. The first component of the case study design is used to develop appropriate research questions. The most appropriate for the qualitative case research questions were “how” and “why” forms of questions. So, in this study such questions were employed on research participants, especially concerning their perception and understanding of roles and values of preschool education and what efforts they made to access preschool education for all children.

The second component of qualitative case study is to define the purpose of the study clearly. Accordingly the purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate early childhood education provision and to explore appropriateness of the curriculum preschools use in line with children learning and development, and the most pressing challenges/barriers in curriculum implementation in the preschools. The unit of analysis is the third component in the qualitative case study research. As described by Yin (2009) the unit of analysis is used as a case study analyzes. He clarified that an appropriate unit of analysis occurs when primary research is precisely specified. The unit of analysis is directly related to the research questions developed by the researcher. Units of analysis in this study are preschools in Dilla town. As described by Merriam (1988) and Yin (2009) the fourth component of case study research design is to connect data to purposes. This connection is made following the data collection phase, as themes emerged. As data is analyzed, the researcher attempts to match patterns that appear in the data to the purpose of the study. In this study; therefore, the themes that emerged attempted to answer the research questions based on the purpose of the study. The fifth component of case study design is used as the criteria for interpreting findings. As described by Yin (2009) the case study researcher codes the data before developing themes, and meaning was extracted from the findings to determine recommendations for effective ECE provision/curriculum implementation.

3.1.2. Setting and participants

The setting and participants of the studies are described as follows.

Setting

The research settings are preschools in Dilla town: community, nongovernmental (private, religious, NGO) and governmental preschools ('O' level or zero classes which are called primary school-based government preschools). They are all located in Dilla town of Gedeo zone in South Nation Nationalities and People Region (SNNP), Ethiopia. The research site, Dilla town is the capital of Gedeo zone and business center. The town is located about 87kms from Hawassa and 365kms from Addis Ababa and found on the main high way route Moyale, Ethio-kenya.

The researcher selected preschools purposefully based on the criteria developed and feedbacks offered by the Woreda education office administrators/experts. Thus, selection of the preschools was carried out by the help of 'Woreda' education office administrators who have recommended preschools to be selected from the profiles based on the criteria prepared by the researcher that are considered: (1) operating for five years and above; (2) approved by the experts/inspectors as they have good performance or adequate learning environment; (3) officially licensed or permitted by the Woreda education office to establish preschool. However, there are more than 20 preschools in the town including preschools which are not officially licensed /permitted to provide preschool education. For this reason preschools that were not licensed were not included in this study.

In general for this study, eight pre-schools were purposefully selected including government 'O' levels. That means six nongovernmental preschools and two governmental ('O' levels) were purposefully selected as observed in Table 1. Similarly age based classification according to the national curriculum guide and policy of ECE was also taken into consideration (4-5 and 5-6) as much as possible even if age based classification is unfair because of lack of birth registration in the Dilla town. These preschools were selected due to the fact that they would provide the relevant information required needed in the study. The participant preschools (settings) are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of participant preschools

Classification	N0	Name. of schools	Type of preschool and Code	Level	Level/program selected
Nongovernmental	1	Siket Academy	Private(A)	1, 2, 3	2&3 /LKG and UKG
	2	Woinesht	Private(B)	1, 2, 3	2&3/ LKG and UKG
	3	Fares	Religious(C)	1, 2, 3	2&3/ LKG and UKG
	4	Michael	Religious(D)	1, 2, 3	2&3/ LKG and UKG
	5	KidaneMihret(Don Bosco)	NGO(F)	1, 2, 3	2&3/ LKG and UKG
	6	University community	Community (E)	1, 2, 3	2&3/ LKG and UKG
Governmental	7	Kofe Primary school-based preschool	Government	Primary school-based preschool or Zero or “O” level	Primary school-based preschool or Zero or “O” level
	8	Dilla Primary school-based preschool	Government	Primary school-based preschool or Zero or “O” level	Primary school-based preschool or Zero or “O” level
		Total	8		

Note: Preschool data collected from ‘Woreda’ education office file (2014/15)

3.1.3. Research participants

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling procedure to get available information. As described by Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) purposeful sampling is the method of choice for qualitative case study so as to gather in-depth information about the research problem.

Participants were categorized into two groups during data collection. The first group was administrators (regional, zone and Woreda education officials or administrators), because they have responsibilities to access preschool education opportunities and to make control on curriculum implementation in accordance with national preschool policy and hierarchy of their administrative positions in the levels of different educational structure . The second group was preschool directors, teachers and parents those who have direct relation or connection in the process of ECE provision/preschool curriculum implementation. Accordingly both groups were selected purposefully for interview.

Participants' selection for this study was based on Maxwell (2005) purposeful sampling selection method. Maxwell (2005) describes purposeful sampling selection as a strategy where particular persons "are selected deliberately in order to provide information that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (p.88). Patton (2002) explains purposeful sampling selection as a critical case sampling, which "permits logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases because if it is true of one case, it is likely to be true of all other cases" (p. 243). Accordingly, participants for this study were selected purposefully. In general in this study participants were educational administrators, directors/proprietors teachers and parents who have knowledge concerning ECE, and support their children to engage in curriculum activities at home and preschool.

Accordingly, thirty eight participants were purposefully selected and participated in the interview and focus group discussions. Hence, one education expert from regional education bureau; two administrators from zonal education department (a manager and expert); three education administrators/experts from 'Woreda' education office (Dilla town administrative education office) were selected purposefully according to their formal education administrative positions or experts roles. Similarly, preschool Directors or administrators/proprietors were also selected accordingly one from each preschool as observed in Table 2. In addition, from each preschool eight key informant teachers were selected purposefully based on their service years in the preschools (who have been serving for a long time).

Furthermore, sixteen parents of preschool children were also selected using purposive criterion sampling. Hence, the initial criteria for the sample selected were based on: (1) their education background (certificate to first degree see Table 6); (2) who have awareness about preschool education and usually visit their children in the preschools and support at home; (3) their involvement in preschool activities; (4) who were volunteers to participate in focus group discussions were also selected purposefully by the help of preschool directors/coordinators from preschools parents' profile. In general non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to select research site and participants. The summary is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants on the research

No	Participant	Regional educ. bureau	Zone educ. department	Woreda educ. office	Preschool/com munity	Total
1	Administrators	1	2	3	-	6
2	Directors	-	-	-	8	8
3	Teachers	-	-	-	8	8
4	Parents	-	-	-	16	16
	Total	1	2	3	32	38

Note: Participant's data collected from field note (2014/15)

3. 2. Instrument

In this study the data gathering instruments were semi-structured interview, observations, focus group discussions and document analysis as well as video and photographing. The semi-structured interview was one of the data-gathering instruments to answer the research question for this study. As described by Denscombe (2007), semi-structured interview was chosen because of its potency to “explore more complex and subtle phenomena” (p.174). Semi-structured interview was employed to gather in-depth information that is required to answer the research questions.

Accordingly, two semi-structured interview guides were developed and implemented in this study. The first interview guide protocol/sheet was developed to gather data from interview participants of zone education department and Woreda education office administrators (see Appendix 2).The interview guide sheet/protocol consisted of two sections and eleven questions. The second interview guide protocol was provided for the preschool teachers and preschool directors/proprietors (see Appendix3). In this guide the questions are grouped into three sections with twenty questions. These include questions about the current existing situation of ECE; actions were taken by the administrators to improve preschool education, action to be taken to enhance the quality and opportunity of preschool education, especially focusing on curriculum implementation and challenges that influence children's learning and development. In gathering qualitative data interview guides have several benefits. Because it is flexible and can allow researcher to explore the answers of the participants further to extract meaning (Bryman, 2008; Patton, 2002; Scott & Usher, 2004).

Observation is also one of the main data gathering tools in this qualitative case study. Patton (2002) described that observation involves “paying attention, seeing what there is to see, and hearing ...; practice in writing descriptively; acquiring discipline in recording field notes”(p. 261). Therefore, data gathering method through observation requires both self-knowledge and special attention. Accordingly, different structured and unstructured observation guide sheets were developed by the researcher to gather in-depth information to answer the research questions (Appendix 5 to 11). It is clearly described by the researcher that observation sheets used in a case study of preschool program have background information at the top of the first page, and the sheets also included a header that provides space to record background information such as the date, setting, participants observed, and observer’s name (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010).

Another data gathering instrument that employed in this qualitative case study was Focus Group Discussion (FGD). In order to gather pertinent information from parent participants, focus group discussion guide with series of nine questions was prepared and implemented (see Appendix 4).

Generally four types of data gathering instruments were developed by the researcher and, then the instruments were commented by the advisor and other professionals. Based on the obtained comments the instruments were refined and implemented.

3.2.1. Data collection procedure

In this qualitative case study a variety of data gathering instruments were employed to obtain in-depth information and the research questions. The researcher used multiple sources of information in the data gathering process: interviews, observations, focus group discussions and documents. Accordingly, the first/initial data were collected over 13 months periods between February 2012-January 2014 and later also additional data were collected when necessary to fulfill the information gaps making continual journeys to the settings. Data collected during these periods included analysis of policy documents and related documents at government offices and preschools, interviews, physical environments (inside classroom and outside classroom) observations, daily based classroom observations were carried out to investigate the ways how curriculum activities practiced in the classroom/group rooms, especially classroom observations took

a long months to observe and gather information from each research preschool classrooms of nongovernmental (private, religious, NGO), community and government preschool program ('O' level).

The researcher visited each research preschool and observed specific elements/variables such as physical environment and facilities of the preschools (e.g. classrooms facilities, materials) and curriculum content, instructional strategies and social interaction between children and teachers in each preschool for four weeks before he went to gather main data in order to understand the preschools existing situations and to establish positive relationships with the participants so that they felt free to communicate their experiences with the researcher. In addition, all documents which help to gather available information were included in the data collection process. Documents like, curriculum guides, ECE policy and strategies, and other related documents available in the research sites were used as the information sources.

Various data gathering procedures were employed based on Patton's (2002) multiple sources of data collection approaches that lead to triangulation and gives detailed insights about the existing preschool education practices and barriers that influence children learning and development. The multiple sources of data also offered an opportunity for the verification of the collected data from different sources. It is also believed that in a basic qualitative research methodology, multiple data collection techniques increase trustworthiness in the research (Merriam, 1998; Pajares, 1992). Generally, in this study multiple sources of data collection methods we reemployed as mentioned earlier to investigate administrators teachers and parents beliefs about role and values of the ECE and challenges they encountered in the implementation process of preschool curriculum.

Various data gathering techniques used were viewed as triangulation of techniques and ensuring rigor, ultimately helped in gathering data from different sources. Triangulation with interviews, focus group discussion, observations, and document analysis was done to verify data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that multiple sources of data could enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Supporting these ideas Richardson (2000) and Denzin & Lincoln (2003) forwards that data from multiple sources help for the crystallization of data, which brings depth, complexity, and

thoroughness. Therefore, based on the qualitative case study approach the researcher gathered data from multiple sources to enhance credibility and trustworthiness. Then each data collection tools and procedures have discussed as follows:

3.2.1.1. Interview

Semi-structured interview was employed to gather in-depth information from administrators, parents and teachers about their understanding of the roles and values of ECE, and barriers that influence children's learning and development using the prepared interview guide.

The prepared semi-structured interview guide sheer were comprised three questions, used to establish rapport and trust between the researcher and the teachers as well as to make respondents more at ease (see Appendix 3). For each participant interview times were scheduled depending on their convenient time or their availability according to the oral agreement made. As a result, zone education department administrators and Woreda/Dilla town administrative education office administrators, actively participated in the interviews. Although, access of finding the region education administrators for interviewing in the SNNPR was limited, one official participated in interview, especially concerning the preschool curriculum planning, dissemination and implementation processes. Interviewing administrators and teachers allowed for identifying and seeking knowledge from key informants. Accordingly, Patton (2002) explains that the key informants are people who are particularly knowledgeable about the inquiry setting and articulate about their knowledge, and whose insights can be helpful in assisting researcher in understanding events that have happened and reasons why those events happened. Individuals who have special knowledge, status or communication skills showed willing to share that knowledge with the researcher agreed on a date, time and venue for the interviews, and all education administrators interviewed in their offices and other teachers interviewed were out with the commonly agreed place based on the convenient places. All interviews were conducted face to face and each interview time lasted from 60-90 minutes and the guide also allowed flexibility in asking follow-up questions.

3.2.1.2. Observation

Observation is one of the main data gathering methods in this study in order to get pertinent answers to the research questions concerning curriculum implementation practices and physical environment and facilities of the preschools. Observation involves paying attention, seeing what there is to see, practice in writing descriptively; carefully collecting and recording field notes so as to validate and triangulate data gathered (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010; Patton, 2002). In this research mainly direct observation and participant observation data gathering methods were employed to extract intensive information and to answer the research questions including video and photographing.

Observation as the data gathering tool, intensive information was carefully collected from preschools learning environments. As it has been pointed out by the researchers, observation data must be in a way that results in accurate, unbiased, and consists richly detailed information (Bandura, Grusec & Menlove, as cited in Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010). For these reasons, the researcher became familiar with the settings and that of participants to collect intensive data from the classrooms, and natural and built physical environments. Accordingly, during the observation data gathering process the researcher was acting as a participant observer being an active participant in some of the interactions. In essence, a collaborative relationship was developed between the observer and preschool administrators and teachers. In most cases direct observation approach was employed, especially to explore preschool learning environment such as inside the classroom and outside the classroom environments, play materials and play fields as well as teachers' instructional approaches in the classroom. In both cases, data gathered through observation were recorded, and compiled as much as possible during the course of a study.

The main aim of observation was to gather pertinent information concerning ECE provision/practices in the classroom, how curriculum activities were implemented practically and how challenges was hindering curriculum implementation in the preschools, and to explore outdoor and indoor learning environments. Thus, in order to answer the research questions concerning physical environment, and education practices in the classroom (contents, instructional strategies, social interaction: child-to-teachers,

teachers- to -child, child-to-child and teachers-to-teachers/adults intensively observed and available data were gathered using the researcher prepared observation guide sheets (see Appendix 5&6). Thus, the researcher observed eight teachers when they were carrying out teaching-learning activities in the classroom at different preschool settings based on classrooms of each preschool's time table for long days. Particularly, classroom observation was used explore if curriculum instruction and activities were being delivered in the way the curriculum intended for preschool children.

Moreover, data concerning physical environment and facilities of each preschool was gathered intensively through observation including schools compounds, classroom physical environment, play materials and equipment availability and their impacts on curriculum implementation using both structured and unstructured observation guide sheets (see Appendix 7 to 11). As mentioned earlier information from preschool physical environments was gathered by using these guide sheets for eight months including journeys for the data verification. In addition to the structured observations of physical environment, field notes, pictures, and artifacts/displays information were gathered using video-tape and photographing. In all instances, observation guide protocol sheets were used to record the observed interactions and situations.

Generally, intensive information were gathered through observations using the guide sheets which allowed to gather pertinent information from inside and outside of the classrooms, especially data from classroom was gathered being daily based starting from 9:00A.M- 3:00P.M in the morning and afternoon. Besides, through observation, teachers' instructional approaches in the classroom were carried out 9:00 to 11:45 A.M and afternoon from 2:00-3:00 P.M for long months.

3.2.1.3. Focus group discussion

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is one of the qualitative research methods and data collection technique in which a selected group of people discusses a given topic or issue in-depth. The technique is based upon the assumption that the group discussions help to identify and clarify shared knowledge that is difficult to obtain with a series of individual interviews. A focus groups is specialized form of interviewing in which a group interview of approximately six to twelve participants share common interests. It is well documented that the research question and research design ultimately guide how the

focus group is constructed. Well-designed focus groups usually last between 60 and 120 minutes (Morgan, 1997; Johnson & Christensen, 2004), and it consist of 6 to 12 participants. The reason for this range of focus group size stems from the goal that focus groups should include enough participants to obtain available information: opinions, beliefs, and experiences from various sources. However, as many studies justified small focus groups are preferable to gather available information from which consist of 3 to 4 participants (Kendrick, 2005; Morgan, 1997; Krueger, 1994) and expected to have specialized knowledge and/or experiences to discuss in a group.

In order to facilitate focus group discussions two key pertinent issues were developed by the researcher. These are the focus group guide and deciding the number and type of participants. Accordingly, the focus group guide was developed by the researcher with the series of 9 questions (see Appendix 4). Typically, the facilitator would ask questions of the group and managed time for participants to respond to each other's comments. The focus group guide served as a "road map" and memory aid for the moderator and facilitator.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants were parents who have understanding about preschool education program and who are usually visiting their children in the preschools and have close relation to the teachers or preschools. Fortunately majority of the parents who have fulfilled the mentioned criteria were teachers who were following their children's performances. Accordingly, sixteen parents, two from each setting or preschool was participated in focus group discussions, particularly concerning parent's perception about the role and value of preschool education and appropriateness of curricula preschools use as well as parents-preschool relationship. To make the discussions manageable and find pertinent information 48 to 92minutes were employed for a focus group discussion according to the oral consensus made between researcher and participants.

Morgan (1997) defines focus groups discussion as a "research technique ...helps to collect data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (p.6). Accordingly three different focus groups were adequately formed to facilitate the parent's focus group discussions: first group consists of six members, second group included six members and the third group comprised four members to make the discussion

manageable and then, total of sixteen participants were participated in the FGDs. During the focus group discussions the moderators were responsible for facilitating the discussion, prompting members to speak, requesting overly talkative members to let others talk, and encouraging all the members to participate. A feature of focus groups is their “explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction” (Morgan, 1997, p. 2). So the participants bounced ideas off each other were allowed them to further explore and reflect upon the issues they were discussed. In general all focus group discussions took place at mutually agreed upon locations and times for both the researcher and participant parents. Ultimately multiple sources of information were collected during focus group discussions, including audiotapes of the participants from the focus groups, notes taken by the moderator and assistant moderator.

3.2.1.4. Document analysis

Data were collected from certain documents from the preschools and from different educational administrative levels which are able to provide pertinent information for the study. The documents gathered during field work were national preschool curriculum guide (MOE, 2010, 2009), regional preschool curriculum guide, zone education department and Woreda education office existing curriculum materials, letters and preschool curriculum guide and curriculum materials were thematically analyzed. Hence, different curricula and activities, and events were reviewed and thematically analyzed. The collected information at schools level included copies of the teachers’ lesson plans, Woreda education office memos, non-confidential teachers’ profile, children performance checklist, attendance registers and health records. The purpose of exploring such documents was to "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2003 p. 87). These documents provided valuable information needed to clarify or extend the research questions and objectives of this study. The documents were initially reviewed and analyzed by coding applicable data using the priori codes established from the research questions and literature. The data recorded from the documents were synthesized with the interview and observation data to corroborate the themes and sub-themes.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis is an essential part of qualitative research that constitutes an essential component in data gathering and in relating the research findings to concepts. As clearly described by Merriam (1998) data analysis is the making sense out of the data. It involves data combining, reducing and interpreting what participants responded, and what the researcher observed and read in order to make meaning. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity (Merriam, 1998). In this study the process of data analysis was continuous and simultaneous, and took place throughout this study. It started from the conceptualization of the research through the entire data collection phase to the interpretation and writing phases. The initial phase of analysis began as early as the first interview (Seidman, 2006). Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher began reading through each transcription, repeatedly reading the data.

This qualitative research followed the case study approach and the data was analyzed also based on Braun and Clarke (2006) step-by-step guidelines. The researcher used the word guidelines to highlight the flexibility of this qualitative analytic method. Five of these guidelines are: (1) familiarizing oneself with his/her data. Data familiarization involved reading and re-reading through the transcripts again and again, and listening to the audio recordings against the original audio recordings for accuracy so as to understand what a participant really meant,(2) generating initial codes. Once familiar with the data, the researcher should identify preliminary codes to provide an indication of the context for conversations and to make the data that appeared interesting and meaningful, (3) the researcher read throughout each transcript to immerse in the data or searching for themes. This step was starting process of the interpretive analysis of the collated codes. Pertinent data were extracted and combined according to overarching themes which is used to create relationship between codes, subthemes, and themes, (4) reviewing themes. A deeper review of identified themes follows where the researcher needs to question whether to combine, refine, separate, or discard initial themes. Accordingly, the researcher made clear and identifiable distinctions between themes so as to generate thematic ‘map’ from this step meaningfully, (5) defining and naming themes. This step involves refining and defining the themes and potential subthemes within the

data. Accordingly, these step-by-step guidelines were implemented in the data analysis process. In addition, a qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying pattern among the categories. The researcher initially read the transcripts and the notes repeatedly in order to identify familiarity with them (Esterberg, 2002; Hatch, 2002). Particularly, as pointed out by Marshall & Rossman (1995) reading, reading and reading once more through the data force the researcher to become familiar with those data in intimate ways.

As a result, the researcher also followed the data analysis and coding procedures that is suggested by Creswell (2009) and Esterberg (2002) because in qualitative research, coding is an integral part of the analysis, involving separating, sorting the data, making sense of it and categorizing it in various ways. Specifically, Esterberg (2002) suggests that open coding is a process where “you work intensively with your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest” (p.158).Accordingly, the transcribed data were searched entirely reading line by line for the regularity, patterns and topics in transcribed data underlining words and phrases.

Creswell (2009) mandated the traditional approach in the social sciences that allows the codes to emerge during the data analysis. Accordingly the transcribed data in this research were examined thoroughly through the open coding process. Hence, the transcribed data were open coded reading line by line to identify words, phrases and sentences for the themes and then, themes and subthemes were emerged from the transcribed data and research questions after thoroughly reading from the transcribed data. As discussed by Miles and Huberman (1994), codes are labels or categories that help to organize the data collected in a qualitative study. Thus, organization of the data involved developing codes to pull out pieces of data related to the research questions. Accordingly, open coding contributed to data reduction, intended to facilitate understanding of similarities and differences between the codes. During open coding the researcher was able to identify themes to link to the research questions. Accordingly, the codes helped to organize a large amount of data into relevant themes and meanings relating to the research questions and literature review. In general the process of analysis was basically inductive in nature proceeding from interviews and observations transcriptions to the general including codes and themes. Therefore, a final list of six

major themes and several subthemes were emerged and listed in Table (see Appendix 1) and discussed accordingly.

3.4. Reliability and Validity

Unlike quantitative research, the reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of the researcher's interactive style, data recording, data analysis and interpretation of participants meaning from the data. Marshall & Rossman (1995) argued that the strength of a qualitative study that aims to explore a problem or describes a setting, a process, a social group or a pattern of interaction will be its validity. Of course using a combination of data types increase validity as the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weakness of another approach. The same author explain that qualitative research commonly use a combination of strategies to secure reliability in the data collection such as verbatim, accounts of conversations, transcripts and direct questions. Validity in qualitative research means the extent to which the data is plausible, credible and trustworthy, and thus can be defended when challenged.

As Patton (2001) states validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing results and judging the quality of the study. In qualitative research the terms credibility and dependability are used interchangeably as reliability and validity to be the essential criteria for quantitative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, Seale (1999), while establishing good quality studies, reliability and validity in qualitative research are trustworthiness. Trustworthiness describes the extent to which an inquirer can persuade audiences that the findings are credible. In order to support credibility activity like member checks with participants were carried out to verify contextual meanings and trustworthiness of the findings. Therefore, in this study the researcher used reliability and validity when designing the study, collecting data, analyzing results and judging the quality of the study.

By including different sources of data collection methods, it is possible to increase the credibility and transferability of the research study results. As Seale 1999 as cited in Sethosa (2001) suggests that triangulation uses multiple methods in the collection of data in order to minimize/compensate the limitation of each method. Hence, data triangulation involved checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods

for consistency of evidence across sources of data. Using multiple data sources both the validity and reliability of the research outcome increased (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It is realized that the use of multiple sources of data or triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in the qualitative case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Sethosa, 2001). As a result, the efforts that made at collecting multiple forms of data allowed for triangulation of information.

The researcher; therefore, used different data sources: interviews, observations, focus group discussion and document analysis so as to increase the credibility and transferability of the research results. The process of gathering data also had taken long months, especially gathering data through observation and interviews to increase validity of the research outcome. Moreover, during data analysis and coding phases the researcher has made repeated journeys to the research site and gathered additional data so as to verify credibility of data.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

A consent form was provided and permission from participants and concerned administrators who have responsibilities in different administrative levels was asked and the researcher allowed carrying out data gathering process. Before formal data gathering program was carried out objectives and significance of the study were informed for all participants.

Before the interviews were carried out the informants were informed about the purpose of the research, confidentiality of the information as it is necessary, the use of video and tape-recorder. Accordingly, they made cooperation with the researcher to provide all necessary information because the researcher created close intimacy for a long time with repeatedly journeys and spending tea time with them. In order to keep privacy and confidentiality are extremely important for human participants, because qualitative methods are highly personal and interpersonal. So identities of all individuals' participants in this study remained confidential, and were filed through pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the participants. However, in other cases photo of participants and preschools' situations would be attached in the text according to the preschools permission (Appendix 12).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The major purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate early childhood education provision for preschool children and to explore appropriateness of the curriculum preschools use in line with children learning and development, and the most pressing challenges/barriers in curriculum implementation in the preschools of Dilla town. Therefore, this chapter focuses on six themes and various subthemes that stemmed from this research study aiming to answer the research questions.

The following research questions were posed for this study: (1) How are the role and values of preschool education understood and perceived by the administrators, teachers and parents? And what beliefs do participants hold regarding education of children with disabilities/special needs? (2) What do participants think children's to learn in preschool for their holistic learning and development? (3) What types of curriculum are the preschools using and how is it implemented? (4) What environment is required for children learning and development? (5) How preschool physical environment and facilities are conducive to support children's learning and development? (6) What are the challenges/barriers for children's learning and development?

In an effort to answer these questions data were gathered through interviews, observations, focus group discussion, photographing and document analysis beginning late January, 2012 to October 2014 for 13 months. Then six major common themes and several subthemes were emerged. The major analyzed themes are: 1) The participants' understanding of the role and value of preschool education; 2) Appropriateness of the curriculum practiced in preschools; 3) Thinking of curricula practiced in preschools; 4) Instruction approaches/strategies; 5) Supportive learning environment; 6) Challenges /barriers preschool education provision/ curriculum implementation and each theme has several subthemes.

In response to the first research question five themes were emerged: Perception on roles and values of preschool education: 1) *Perception of participants*; 2) *Access for preschool education*; 3) *Parent-preschool relationship*; 4) *Resources availability and support system*; 5) *Awareness and attitudes of the participants' towards education of CWDs* and they are discussed as follows.

4. 1. Perception on Roles and Values of Preschool Education

Regarding the first research question, the role and values of ECE questions were provided for the preschool directors/proprietors, teachers and parents because these groups of people/stakeholders have responsibility in the preschool education provision and curriculum implementation process. Thus, as an initial step, stakeholders were: parents who are considered the front-line stakeholders; the second group was made up of the mandated education administrators who have responsibility develop and promote curriculum and oversee the curriculum implementation in the preschools; the last category comprises the directors/proprietors and teachers who have direct relationships and provide education to children in the preschools.

The researcher first sought to find out how participants perceive the role and values of preschool education. Each participant was actively participated and reflected her/his views regarding the role and values of preschool education in relation to the children learning and development as well as CWDs/special needs education. Besides, the interview participants' background information and preschools were listed down in the Tables according to the assumed letters and numbers 'code' instead of pseudonyms.

A number of important findings emerged from the analyzed data. Participants described the values and role of ECE in relation to children learning and development, as a foundation for children to develop school readiness skills prior to attending primary school.

4.1.1. Perceptions of Zone, Woreda and Regional Education Administrators/experts

Table 3: Education administrators/experts participated in the interview

NO	Participan ts Code	Sex	Age	Year of service	Education level	Preschool background	Education administration hierarchy/level
1	RA	M	36	15	BA	No	Region Educ. bureau
2	ZA1	M	34	12	MA	No	Zone Educ. department
3	ZA2	M	42	20	BA	No	Zone Educ. department
4	WA1	M	43	19	BA	No	Woreda Educ. office
5	WA2	M	44	21	BA	No	Woreda Educ. office
6	WA3	M	37	13	BA	No	Woreda Educ. office

Since preschool curriculum development is within the domain of public policy, and its implementation and evaluation are conducted by mandated education administrators/experts, the first interviews were carried out with education administrators of regional, zone and Woreda education administrators based on the first question. Accordingly, through in-depth interviews, the participants described their own perceptions and experiences concerning role and values of the preschool education.

Administrators widely explained how they perceived/understood the role and values of the preschool education for children corresponding to children's learning and development. The participants also described that when children engaged in play activities in the built and natural physical environment, they are able to interact with people, with a variety of materials and equipment through interaction. This indicates that they had awareness of the values of ECE and were able to refer to certain concepts that promote children's learning and development. During interview data collection they explained so many important issues about the roles and values of preschool education; however, as practically observed their efforts were low as the responsible administrators' to support those values that they described on the ground.

They also explained that preschool education is used as the 'cornerstone' for the children's learning and development for instance... "Well-planned and organized preschool education could help children to meet their diverse needs at the early years of life and would promote their school readiness skills" (ZA1, ZA2). Besides, supporting the mentioned ideas one of the Woreda education officials explained that, "...as I have practically observed...preschool education has positive values for the children's further education achievements..." (ZA2).

During the interview Zone and Woreda administrators/experts described that children who have got opportunity enrolled for preschool education could develop social interactions with adults and their peers and build up confidence, learn how they could accomplish activities and develop new experiences with confidence (ZA2, WA1). Some experts considered the values of ECE as milestones for the children learning and development that a quality preschool education is one of the essential ways to ensure children's readiness skills and help them to be successful in primary school education and prepare for long-term educational success. Thus, early childhood education has great

values for children's growth, development, and learning because children could develop their understanding through exploration and experimentation their immediate social and natural environment (ZA, WA2, WA3).

The interview participant administrators have explained briefly regarding the benefits of the ECE/preschool in relation to physical, social/emotional and cognitive development of the children. The better equipped children with the preschool/ECE at the start would be the most effective and beneficial in later education levels. They also described the roles and values of preschool education as follows:

Of course ECE for preschool children basically plays a great role in learning and development...helps children to "explore and experience" world around them (RA). Children who have got opportunity to participate in preschool education can "experience school manner and behavior" before entering primary school... and when they enter primary school they [children] can easily "adapt a new school environment". ...preschool education can also play a great role in promoting developmental domains (physical, social/emotional and cognitive development) of the children...so children, who have equipped better at the preschool age, would be more effective and beneficial at the late education levels (RA, ZA1,WA1).

Moreover, interview participants of education administrator described the importance of the preschool education that preschool education not only plays significant role for children to have successful completion of primary education, but also help them to be successful in their lifelong learning. Thus, ECE could create opportunities for children to explore and experience their world around them being with their peers or individually so that preschool education is valuable start for children to promote all-round development in the domains like intellectual, physical and social. As a result preschool education can prepare children for primary school to higher educations. Thus, preschool education has significant values in promoting all-rounded developments, and inspires children for further successful learning and living.

The interview responses of the education administrators/experts have confirmed that they have positive perception and understanding towards the role and values of early childhood education for the preschool children and they explained that preschool education could encourage children to develop social interaction and sense of belonging with other people. Thus, children in preschools learn to develop risk taking and resolving skills when they [children] meet challenges. The children who have passed through the preschool education at appropriate ages could easily overcome social challenges,

especially when they entered school. As the same time (WA1, WA3) respondents explained:

Preschool education plays pertinent roles in children to develop “self-concept, self-control, cooperative learning through play and social relationships with adults and their peers”.... besides, ECE program minimizes working parents’ burden and they perform their activities without being anxious for their children. So, it is [ECE] valuable for both parents and children.

Regional education bureau expert (RA) and zone education department education administrators (ZA1& ZA2) shared similar ideas explained by the Woreda education office administrators(WA1&WA3) and added some important points that quality preschool education enables children to be more capable and confident during the primary school education and in the next education levels. For instance, ECE plays an important role by developing important concepts about physical and social learning environment among children. In turn ECE would establish foundation for children’s lifelong learning. “...preschool education program has multi-dimensional roles with a focus on the holistic development of children...”. For example; children promote desirable social/emotional development engaging in social interaction with their peers and teachers as well as other preschool personnel. Hence, children who are enrolled for the preschool program at appropriate age are able to learn how they manage and cope with their emotion and are able to develop strong relationships with their peers and adults. Accordingly, one of the zone education experts (ZA2) explained the benefits of preschool education as follows:

...preschool education has capacity in preparing children to be aware of school rules, develop self-care and social skills ...so preschool education has a great value “developing literacy and numeracy” skills of the children and to learn confidently in the next education steps such as primary and secondary schools... preschool education is essential for both the individual child and parents as well as for the society as a whole, in a broader sense. In addition early education provides children better opportunities in the “long term of the children life” such as prepare them for school and decrease dropouts’ rates in the countries education system so that preschool education has short and long term values for the children, parents and the community.

Respondent agreed that preschool education could play a significant role not only in the social/emotional and academic benefits but also it has played a great role in the current and long term life of the children. It was also believed that ECE can decrease

dropouts' rate and contribute for the countries development creating socially alert and mentally capable children. So nearly all administrator respondents have nearly similar perception concerning role and values of the preschool education to the children's learning and development and they also perceived that preschool education could benefit parents, children, and community at large. In a conversation made with one of the zone education experts concerning values of the new national preschool education policy and strategies. He stated that:

We have started to put early childhood education as a major educational agenda, especially after the new ECE policy framework and strategies had been developed and disseminated by the (MOE, 2010). Of course, we are working hard to prove quality early education for all children in different settings (private, religious organization, NOG, community) because ECE has a short and long term values and effects on the children's later life...we also understood the contribution of ECE for the "country economic and social sustainable development"... establishing a strong foundation in the children life (ZA1).

In general the interviews that were carried out with administrators confirmed that education administrators or experts have understanding about the value of preschool education as a crucial issue for the children learning and development. They were also aware of the benefits of preschool education for the children's lifelong development and contribution for the country sustainable economic development; however, practically preschool education did not carry out in accordance with the ECE policy framework and strategies (MOE, 2010) to address children's holistic development. Thus, as mentioned earlier, their efforts low to support preschool education and to bring quality in preschool education.

4.1. 2. Perception of preschool directors/proprietors

Table 4: Interview participants of preschool directors/proprietors

NO	Participants Code	Sex	Age	Year of service in preschool	Education level	Preschool background	School code	Type of preschool
1	D1	M	55	10	BA	No	A	Private
2	D2	M	48	12	Diploma	No	B	Private
3	D3	M	27	5	BA	No	C	Religious
4	D4	F	29	6	BA	No	D	Religious
5	D5	M	32	5	MA	No	E	Community
6	D6	F	28	7	BA	No	F	NGO
7	D7	F	29	4	BA	No	D	Government
8	D8	M	48	4	BA	No	H	Government
Total	8						8	

Like education administrators/experts, for the preschool directors/proprietors similar questions were forwarded concerning the role and values of preschool education. Interestingly, their responses were not so different from that of education administrators/officials' responses. One of the private preschool director/proprietor (D1) described the value of preschool education that, "...I think preschool education creates special opportunities for children to experience and explore in the new natural and social environment of the preschool..." ECE/preschool education plays significant role children to make a meaningful involvement and interaction with people and objects, and develop a sense of new experiences. One of the respondents from religious preschool (D2) also explained that:

I think it [ECE] could be foundation for all rounded development of the children... For example, when we build a house or building...the strength of that building is based on the strength of the foundation... if a foundation is strong, it will live for a long time...if the foundation is weak, and it could not exist for a long time...similarly children require strong foundation for lifelong development.

Other respondents supported the reflected ideas that if children get opportunity for quality ECE, it could be good foundation for the children development, social, physical and intellectual development (D3, D4). From the preschool education program children learn basic skills in writing, reading and math. They can also understand school rules and behavior as well as children are able to develop social interaction with their peers and school community. Besides, parents from Group I (FGD) also shared almost similar views concerning the values of the ECE/preschool education that:

We perceive and understand the values of preschool education in different angles ...like as a starting point and as a real way for the children move to primary school...it helps children to understand school culture and behavior before entering primary school. ... it [ECE] also can play an important role for children to construct meaningful interaction with their peers, teachers and objects in the preschool learning environment...of course, such positive social interactions could encourage children to engage and understand a new school environment that is out of their home...it also provides opportunities for children to investigate the environment around them.

In order to know what understandings they have concerning the values of ECE for preschool children the researcher has raised some similar questions to preschool directors. Accordingly, one of the directors was asked where he received preschool education training [institute] and for how long he was trained in early childhood

education program, and if he was not trained in preschool education before, how he deals with preschool children. He described that:

...of course I did not have any training for preschool education/ECE... as I told you earlier, when I came here [Dilla town] with my family... I did not have the opportunities to send my children to preschool due to absence of preschool in the town then... initiated/forced me to open my preschool and then, I hired trained teachers for the first time and later on I myself established preschool training center to overcome the existing challenges. ...before opening the teacher training center I have gathered important information and experiences from different institutes and preschools through experiences sharing process. I believe that children who are learning in preschools will be good citizens morally, socially and intellectually ...and they can contribute to the country development. Besides, they will be competent in their future education, and they will lead their life in good ways (D2).

Although preschool proprietors/directors did not have ECE background knowledge, they have perceived the values of preschool education in line with the future bright life of the children. Children those who have not got preschool education opportunity 'before seven' would have met challenges when enrolled for primary grade without basic reading, writing and arithmetic knowledge and skills. However, those children who have got opportunity for the preschool enrollment at least could develop understanding about school environment and promote school readiness skills. They also believe that ECE is used as a foundation for the children's holistic development incorporating physical, social/emotional and cognitive domains. Accordingly directors/proprietors explained that community perceived preschool education as a 'springboard' for children learning and development. As a result... children who have got opportunity to enroll for the preschool education are expected to be effective in their further education... because most parents who have sent their children to the preschool considered ECE as a "valuable investment in a child's mind..." Even if education is a life-long process, parents expect as their children to pay back all education expense to their parents and country after graduation from college/university (D2, D6). Private preschool interview participants also explained that "...most of the parents are happy to pay education fee on time ...". Thus, they have understanding about the value of preschool education more than reading, writing and math skills development. Because they perceived as ECE could contribute a lot to child's holistic learning and development. For example, in the preschool children learn through concrete hands-on learning

materials that cannot be found in their home, and they [children] may construct their own skills, knowledge, intelligence, moral and social behaviors and personality because they can get better opportunities to explore and experiences within the social and physical environment (D2, D3, D5, D6).

Preschool director/proprietor respondents perceived ECE education as basis for the children current and future learning and development. Thus, ECE could create opportunity for children to learn how to learn in the new school environment interacting with peers, teachers and other preschool personnel. Besides, most directors understood the importance of the ECE relating to the investment that implemented to bring quality in the education system because it has sound foundation to ensure quality in education and to produce capable human capital to the country (D1, D4, D5). Moreover, ECE can play a vital role children learn within the social, cultural and physical environment that help them in order to promote constructive ideas through planned hands-on play materials which are not available in their home. Thus, in preschool programs children were observed when they have tried to build their own system of knowledge, intelligence, morality and personality, especially during interactive play activities.

Moreover, directors from private preschool have explained the importance of the ECE/preschool education in relation to academic and social values, and the problems that the preschool encountered to provide quality ECE for preschool children. For example, there is a big observable difference between those children who have got chance to attend preschool education and those who have not before entering primary school (D1, D2, D3).

On the other hand director from one of the religious preschool was asked how he perceived the role and values of early childhood education for preschool children. Accordingly she clarified her beliefs that since early childhood education for preschool children was internationally accepted child right, it has high value for children development and learning at an early critical time so that ECE is right program in order to create socially competent, morally built and physically strong and healthy citizens (D3). Thus ECE should be considered as a base for further education and lifelong development. She added some important points as follows:

ECE is acceptable program in all nations as the ‘child right’ ...because it could play a crucial role in children’s holistic learning and development. So we make

great efforts to promote children's holistic learning and development engaging children in social and academic area learning such as math, language, science (D3).

As observed by the researcher, even though preschools did not have available teaching and play materials, they made efforts to engage children in academic areas learning, daily routines and activities that help to promote children's learning and development.

Respondent (D8) from one of the government "O" level program stated that children's early experiences can be influenced positively or negatively depending on their family and community socio-economic background. Because of family low socio-economic background problem so many children still did not get opportunities for ECE and primary education too. In order to minimize such problems free 'O' levels education opportunity for children who come from poor family were provided in government primary schools. However, such a program is not still accessible for the children who come from the parents' low socio-economic background. As a result, there is a huge gap between the preschool education policy directives and practices on the ground. He continued that:

We are working hard to create opportunity for children who have not got early education opportunities because of their family socio-economic problems so that we have provide free preschool education opportunity in government primary schools at least children are able to develop school readiness skills (reading, writing and arithmetic), develop positive social behavior and motor development skills... because social experiences that have been developed in the preschool years enable children to adapt a new social environment in the school years, and such experiences further enhance children's social competence and self-regulation skills.

In addition, the directors (D7) from one of the government schools describe the benefits of the preschool education for the transition of school as follows:

We are now very happy because of preschool education program has been started in our primary schools to provide school readiness skills for children because we were obliged to admit children age seven and above to be enrolled for grade one without any numbers and letters alphabets back ground/awareness...because children who come to government primary schools from the poor families to start from grade one were challenged by a new school environment and to learn grade one curricula without at least having basic literacy and numeracy skills...but now we are preparing children for primary education or providing school readiness skills before transition to the primary school.

Of course, now such a program helped children to overcome social and academic challenges in school. Children who have gotten preschool education opportunity could at least develop numeracy and literacy skills/school readiness skills.

One of the teachers from the same school also explained that children who have developed school readiness skills are capable of competing with other children who come from religious and private preschools when they enrolled for the primary school education.

Primary school-based preschools or “O” levels program have played a great role for those children who have not got opportunity to be enrolled in private preschools because of their family socio-economic background problems. Hence, children are prepared for primary school, particularly in reading writing, math and social skills development. Children in government primary-based preschools could learn not only numeracy and literacy skills development programs but they could also learn social behavior; simple mathematical operations, language, science and physical activities which are able to promote basic motor development through individual, pair and group play activities, especially those children who come from low socio-economic families have got a better opportunity to play in school field/playground rather than at their home. Moreover, activities that are able to develop school manner and behaviors would be provided in preschools that help to learn ethical issues. Preschool education could also get them to be ready for further education and help them to develop positive social behaviors in their school. Furthermore, children learn how they manage their emotions and behaviors that help them to make meaningful friendships with their peers because socio-emotional development is an important prerequisite for school readiness skills development and to later education success. Thus, preschool education helps children develop social interaction with adults and peers; build cooperation with the teachers and parents that are able to foster mutual assistance between preschool and parents concerning children education/learning and development.

Other respondents shared nearly similar views and added some important points that preschool education was long year trend in Ethiopia, but in this zone/town it is a new trend because of low awareness and lack of opportunity for ECE. However, now people have awareness about the values of preschool education for children learning and

development, and parents' awareness is increased to send their children to the preschool because they now consider ECE as a good foundation for their children further education. In addition, parents have understanding concerning the benefits of ECE for children further academic achievement and social interaction in school. For example, self-confidence that children are developed and positive social interaction will have continued at later school ages as well as enhance children's academic and social competence in primary school(D5,D1). They also explained that:

Children's social competencies can also be developed more when they engaged in structured and unstructured social play activities....when they develop desirable social interaction with adult and their peers they become competent academically and socially. Besides, children learn social rules such as, giving and taking turn, cooperation, and sharing (D5, D1, T5). ...through interaction children also learn ethical issues to develop sense of social values....T5.

On the other hand teachers and director/proprietors from the same preschools added more ideas concerning the values of ECE for both children and parents that ECE not only benefits children but also could benefit reducing working parents' burden because teachers share their responsibility and burdens taking care of children at the preschool. This can be considered as one of the causes parents to send their children to preschool.

Finally, the researcher has forwarded similar questions for the teacher and director interview participants of the government primary school-based preschools ('O' levels) concerning the values of ECE for both children and parents. Accordingly they have reported that children who were following "O" level or zero classes had benefited, particularly children who come from low socio-economic families even if they are heterogynous age groups (4 to 9) in a classroom. In some critical conditions, enrollment ages of the children's may be exceeded from mentioned ages because of absence of birth registration/certificates (D7, D8, T8). Director (D8) from one of the government schools continued that children those who were ignored from education system because of their parents' socio-economic problem, now few of them have got opportunity to be enrolled for the preschool education in primary-based preschools.

Today, in Dilla town so many children/kids are exposed for street life because of low socio-economic and related problems such as large family size even if they have understanding about the values of ECE for their children. As a result they are not able to

send their children to the government or private preschools nearby their home or distant from their home. In contrast some parents who are able to pay education fee do not send their children to the preschool because of awareness problem and being business minded so that they do not bother about their children education rather they prefer their children follow their footsteps to support their business. Director (D7) added:

...children who have not got opportunity to go to preschool are serving in 'shisha' or houses that used children as the servant to prepare 'tobacco' for smokers... or 'chat' chewing houses, especially children who are living in such business areas are abused socially, physically and psychologically. As a result, 'the child rights' have been abused, particularly children age of 6 and above...even if there is free education opportunity in government schools... Nevertheless, accesses for free preschool education in government schools are less to serve all children of the poor parent's.

Concerning the provision of the free education program for children of the poor parents in government preschools, similar questions were forwarded to the government school directors and Woreda education office administrators that how they tried to access free preschool education for the children of the poor family and how they were carried out fair enrollment. One of the directors explained that they did not have available resources to fulfill all parents need such as trained teachers for preschools, adequate classrooms, teaching materials. However, few children have got enrollment opportunity when compared to the number of children enrolled (D8).

Children from poor families do not obtain accessible opportunity to join preschool education program in government schools before age seven...many children did not get opportunity to join preschools not only because of parents socio-economic problem, but also because of lack of parents awareness for preschool education(WA1,WA2, D7, D8). They also stated that currently free preschool education opportunity has created for parents to send their children to the primary-based preschool for the free education program. As a result, parents need is highly increased to send their children to the government primary schools-based preschool program. However, schools have met challenges to give enrollment opportunity for all parents who have requested their children to be admitted for preschool education program because of lack of special budget for the program. As a result, access for such a program is still low because of limited resources to enroll all children in this program (WA2, D7). However, those children who have got free preschool education opportunity, at least develop social

behavior, literacy and numeracy skills. They have also got opportunity to continue grade education in the same school.

4.1.3. Teachers' perceptions

Table 5: Background information of interview participant teachers

NO	Participant TeachersCode	Sex	Age	Year of service	Year/month of training	Academic qualification/education level	Preschools' Code	Type of preschool
1	T1	F	38	15	3 months	Certificate	A	Private
2	T2	F	35	12	10 months	Certificate	B	Private
3	T3	F	31	13	3 months	Certificate	C	Religious
4	T4	F	31	6	10 months	Certificate	D	Religious
5	T5	F	28	8	3 months	Certificate	E	Community
6	T6	F	27	7	10 months	Certificate	F	NGO
7	T7	F	25	7	10 months	Certificate	G	Government
8	T8	F	32	11	2 years	Diploma	H	Government

The same questions had forwarded to the teacher interview participants on how they perceived the role and value of preschool education. Teacher respondents had expressed their view concerning the role and values of ECE for the preschool children. Hence, the same interview questions were also forwarded for teacher respondents alike for the education administrators/experts did and they had expressed their views that early childhood education is so important for the acquisition of concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for the children holistic learning and development(physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development) so that ECE for preschool children could provide various opportunities for the children's all-rounded development. They also explained that children who have got opportunity for the preschool education program apparently develop social interaction with their peers and teachers... they can also develop language and communication skills participating in pair and group play activities. One of the teachers (T1) from private preschool 'A' stated:

Appropriately planned preschool education has a great value for the children's learning and development. We have planned curriculum materials and daily,

weekly and annual lesson plans taking the ages of preschool children into consideration...the planned activities also help us to promote children's physical, social/emotional and language development. ...T2 explained ...we give important emphasis for the children academic, social and emotional development... we orient and encourage them develop desirable social behavior in school and at home ...being here, children get opportunity to play with their peers unstructured and structured play when they stay at their home they cannot get such opportunities because many of them come from inconvenient villages and uneducated families. Thus, preschools are convenient places for children for facilitating learning and developmental activities.

The teachers explained that preschool is valuable setting to develop children's social/emotional and academic development such as basic writing, reading and arithmetic skills. In turn these skills might help them to promote cognitive development (T5). In preschool children can obtain opportunities to interact with teachers, peers and other school personnel that helps them to develop social interaction between children and adults so that the preschool education plays a great role in children's holistic learning development. Moreover, teacher (T6) also shared the mentioned views and she added some points that:

...preschool education also has enormous role in children development and learning...for example it can improve school readiness skills... reduce delayed enrolment, drop-out and grade repetition and enhance academic achievement in later educations.

Preschool teachers perceive the role of the preschool education relating to children holistic learning and development. So they clearly described that children in preschool were able to develop social experiences when they play being with other children and in turn such play activity could help them develop social skills and confidence that enable them[children] promote social competence at early years, in turn these experiences further enhance self-confidence, self-esteem and self-regulation of the children. Nearly all teachers explained that they had been providing planned activities for the children that would make children to be highly competent in primary school... so they also explained that preschool education could promote children's social/emotional, physical; and cognitive development and improves academic achievement in their further education. Some teachers also forwarded some important points regarding the vales of ECE for preschool children relating to the quality learning environments that quality learning environment has a great value for children to develop desirable social behavior

so that the values of the ECE have direct relationship to the quality of learning environment because such convenient learning environment could foster children's to investigate, explore and experience their environment (T3, T4, T8).

Additionally, majority of interview respondent teachers described nearly similar perceptions concerning the roles and values of ECE that children who are enrolled in preschool settings are able to participate in planned and unplanned play activities and could learn play rules that related to the ethical issues. So children who are actively involved in an individual, pair and group play activities could develop their language and communication skills (T3, T4, T6).

Respondents from different preschools also forwarded nearly similar views that children who have got significant support and close follow up from their teachers...could develop self-regulation and social skills. They also continued that those children who were better prepared in academic and social learning areas in the preschools would be successful in academic and nonacademic learning areas later in school. They also believed that a quality ECE programs could play a significant and supportive roles for the children social and physical development. When children participated in different physical and social play activities they could promote their motor development, improve language abilities and they could exercise challenges before entering school [T2, T4, T5]. One of the teachers (T5) described preschool education role in terms of social development as follows:

ECE can contribute for the children social development...when children properly supported based on their ages, needs, capacities and interests,... they can promote desirable social development through desirable social interaction ...as I observe in my daily activities children developed "self-control, self-esteem, and taking turn when they play and communicate with their peers...and understand how they keep classroom and out of classroom disciplines"...they can also develop language skills through social interaction when they play with their peers so that ECE has great values for the children's learning and development.

Furthermore, teachers from government primary based preschool or "O' level (T7, T8) explained that the roles and values of ECE were not limited to learning numeracy and literacy but it also enables children to understand ethical and social issues...that are expected manners in their preschools. Hence, preschool education could play a great role in preparing children's school readiness skills. For example, reading writing, math and science. Those children who have passed through preschool process

will have contributed a lot in the country development in their later age. Another teacher from one of the religious preschools shared the forgoing views saying that one could predict children's future observing from what they are doing and acting in their social/emotional behaviors and their interests in academic learning areas. She continued... "...really,... in my long years teaching experience I observed huge education gap between children who have passed through ECE processes and those who were not passed through the process..." (T4, T8). They also shared similar views about the values of ECE for the preschool children saying that they saw children who had gotten adequate preschool education at expected age became successfully in their later education. So those children, who have got age appropriate early education in the preschool, later would contribute a lot in the economic, social and political development of the country.

Teachers have good perception concerning the importance of the preschool education for the children's learning and development. As interview and observation results showed teachers have tried to facilitate preschool environment to be conducive for children learning and development that enable children to engage in creative learning activities, problem solving, and free play activities. Besides, teacher respondents stated that preschool education has made valuable contribution for the children's social/emotional, physical and cognitive development in the traditional and modern learning environment. In the preschool children are able to learn cultural, academic and social values participating in various traditional and modern play activities with their peers. So children are encouraged to be involved in the play activities so as to promote developmental domains depending on the availability of trained teachers, play materials and equipment in preschools.

Teachers also have forwarded almost similar views as administrators regarding the role and values of ECE that preschool education is foundation for all-rounded children's development (physical, social/emotional and intellectual development). They also explained that through social interaction children can also learn social value. For example, when children involved in different play activities and play together with their age mates they would help one another as well as learn how they have taken turn when they share play materials and equipment. As most of the interview participant teachers

were agreed that preschools could contribute a lot for children learning and development, especially for those children who did not have opportunity to play at their home because of safe and sufficient place, play materials and equipment. For example, some children who come from inconvenient villages or homes they so love to come preschool because they could share play field/ground, play materials and equipment with other children and are able to move freely in the playground.

Ongoing teacher responses ensure the importance of ECE for the children's learning and development. The roles and values of preschool education could contribute a lot for the desirable social development and critical thinking skills so that ECE has great values in children's learning and development.

4.1.4. Parent participants' perception

Parents with different backgrounds participated in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gather information concerning their perception/understanding of the role and values of ECE grouping sixteen parents in three sub-groups as observed in Table 6.

Table 6: Background information of participant parents in FGD

Group	No	Pseudonyms	Code	Education level	Current job	Age	Gender	
							M	F
I	1	Mekonnen	P1	Certificate	teacher	37	X	
	2	Meskerem	P2	Certificate	teacher	39		X
	3	Analem	P3	Diploma	teacher	38		X
	4	Fantanesh	P4	Diploma	teacher	32		X
	5	Temesgen	P5	Degree	accountant	45	X	
	6	Tarkegn	P6	Diploma	Driver	47	X	
II	7	Dawit	P7	Diploma	Teacher	36	X	
	8	Desalegn	P8	degree	accountant	40	X	
	9	Demekech	P9	Diploma	Teacher	39		X
	10	Dereje	P10	Degree	Teacher	45	X	
III	11	Aselefech	P11	Diploma	Teacher	42		x
	12	Abebew	P12	degree	teacher	38	x	
	13	Kacha	P13	degree	Teacher	28	x	
	14	Serkalem	P14	certificate	Teacher	32		x
	15	Abu	P15	Certificate	Teacher	35		x
	16	Abichu	P16	Certificate	teacher	34		x

Source: Parent FGD

As explained earlier, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was carried out totally for 192 minutes and with each group at different days. Group I 4/04/2015 for 72 minutes, Group II, 6/04/2015 for 72 minutes and Group III 20/04/2015 for 48 minutes to obtain

relevant information from parents about benefits of ECE for both children and parents. Each group discussion was carried out at and parents were actively participated in the FGDs. Parent participants in each FGD generally had described comparing children who have attended preschool education would be academically more successful than children did not attend preschool education program.

Most parent participants in each group of FGD perceived the roles and values of the early childhood education as a more crucial issue for the children's learning and development. Thus, children acquire personal and social values through social interactions in the preschool environment in addition to their homes. In order to practice such activities teachers required to encourage and create opportunities for the children learning and development through play activities, storytelling, music and drama, and using other related activities that are able to develop children's self-confidence, self-control and social skills.

FGD result from Group I showed that the parents' perception concerning the role and values of preschool education, somehow have similarities to that of teachers and preschool directors interview responses. They also have perceived the importance/values of the preschool/ECE as the foundation for all-rounded development of the children, thus children who have got access to enter into preschool program at expected ages have got opportunities to involve in activities that help them to promote physical, social/emotional and cognitive development (P1, P2, P5 from Group I). All parent participants in Group I FGD also agreed that preschool education serves as a base for children learning and development. Thus, preschool education could play important roles in the further education and prepare children for lifelong learning and development. The same views were forwarded by the FGD participants of the Group II that children who attended quality ECE would be highly confident in the primary school education, and can easily adapt a new school environment (T7, T10). That is, parents perceived ECE program as the foundation for the further education processes and they have understanding about the values of the quality ECE programs.

Parents who participated in Group III of FGD had somehow common understanding concerning the role and values of ECE for preschool children from that of Group I. They had expressed that preschool education could help children to understand

school behavior; school rules and develop language skills through social interaction when they play together. Through play they could obtain supplementary knowledge about school and home social learning environment because after children have enrolled in preschools they promote social interaction in better ways with their siblings and neighborhood children what they did not do before. One of the parents from Group III FGD participants briefly explained her opinion concerning the role and value of preschool education corresponding to the children social development and parents' perception towards preschool education. She expressed:

Actually, as I understood preschool plays a great role for both parents and children. When parents send their children they can carry out their activities at home or work places freely because parents belief preschool as takes care of their children and children also get access to play with other age mates using different materials and equipment with the close follow up of the teachers...they also get opportunity to learn from preschool natural and physical environment... Since, preschool education is foundation for all-later grade levels education of the children... which in turn can develop children's self-confidence; self-regulation and social interaction when they play with their peers in pair and group...they can also develop communication skills when they interact with their peers (P11 from Group3).

On other hand (P14, P16 from Group III) explained that:

...as we have observed children learn through various play activities that help them to promote learning and development, like physical play, storytelling, writing, reading and math according to their abilities and interests in the preschool. Hence, preschool education is powerful to influence positively children's academic learning and social behavior. So children can develop experiences about themselves and world around them.

Parents who have understanding about the role and value of ECE explained that the preschool education as a powerful tool which brings progress in the child learning and development when they learn in the conducive social learning environment. Because children are not only expected to develop reading, writing and arithmetic skills but they are also expected to develop social skills and ethical issues in the school (P15). She continued that:

Preschool education can prepare children psychologically, physically, socially and emotionally for the primary school. "...preschool education establishes strong bases for children to be responsible persons in their future life ...and it could likely use as a road map for further education goal..."

Similarly other respondents from Group III shared the same ideas and added their views that ECE is very important for children learning and development because children

are very interested to experience and explore world around them to develop a new knowledge in school environment that is not experienced at home. For instance, children better understand teachers than parents. Accordingly one of the FGD participants shared her expectance concerning the values of ECE as follows:

My five year old son was not active to play with other children, he did not want to investigate and explore things around him at home but most of the time he needs to be with me rather than playing with the siblings. After he joined preschool he has shown radical change and became socially active and plays with other children. She continued...now my child has brought observable change physically and socially... He is also highly ambitious to read and write different materials (P15 from Group III).

This shows that parents have good understanding about the values of ECE and accordingly they explained that children are more interested to experience and explore better in the preschool environment than at their home environment. In addition, one of the parents from the same group shared her experiences concerning the value of preschool education, she said that:

I got chance to observe such a truth in my friend's son, when he was 4 years old, he was passive in every social activities which expected from a child... usually he preferred playing being alone and not interested to play with other children including his siblings at home...but he was approaching and communicating a bit with his mother only. However, after he had joined preschool/KG, teachers made great efforts to bring behavioral change on this child involving his parents. Gradually he would become active participant in different play activities with his age mates and developed social interaction with adults and his peers. Now he has brought amazing behavioral change so that I belief that preschool education is a foundation for all-rounded development so that parents have to know the values of ECE for the children learning and development(P16 from Group III).

On the other hand one of the parents from FGD group II had shared her experience concerning ECE values that:

ECE is so many things to me... For example my child [four years old] usually needs to be alone and play lonely...before entering preschool/KG... Now she is socially active and plays with other children (peers). She asks me different questions and sings songs that she learned in school...she is happy to go to preschool...as my colleagues said earlier preschool education is the 'right' place to prepare children socially, physically and intellectually before entering primary school (P9).

Moreover, parents in FGDs have made a hot discussion regarding the role and values of preschool education... then they were using synonymous words and phrases during the discussions, like holistic development, all-rounded development, foundation, bases for further education/lifelong education and the like. For example, participants

explained that “ECE is foundation for the children holistic development”. Besides, children who have participated in ECE program could explore and realize their environments through hand-on learning experiences with the help of adult guidance/scaffolding (Parents in FGDs in Group I, II &III).

During FGD with parents, the researcher forwarded various questions that help to know parents’ understanding about ECE roles and values for children and they also raised many issues based on the forwarded discussion questions and they expressed important issues concerning ECE values and roles. They also defined preschool education/ECE in different ways. Thus, most FGD participant parents from all Group of FGD stated that preschool education is a kind of education that is provided for children before entering primary school...” and it helps to prepare children for primary education providing basic social, physical and academic areas learning, stimulating through play activities. Preschool education is essential even to identify learning problem [at risk conditions] many children with different learning problems were not identified before going to school because many parents did not know clearly what problems their children had. However, in the preschool children expected to move here and there, run, jump, and play with their peers...if a child lack such skills teacher inform for parents and work collaboratively with parents to solve the problem what a child had gotten. Moreover, children explore and experience things in preschool environment in a better way than at home environment...activities which children do in school help them to develop desirable social behavior and physical strength, because most activities that taken places in preschool are planned and somehow scientific (P1, P 4, P7, P 12). Besides, parents FGD results show from group II and Group III supported other respondents view and added some points saying that:

We agree on issues that our colleagues raised...those children who are started ECE at an appropriate age would be advantageous in their later education...” if education approach is age appropriate and not tedious, it could play great role for the children’s lifelong learning and development. Thus, if the learning activities are supported by the age appropriate available play materials and equipment that help children promote physical and social/emotional development ...because “many children in our community never find play materials and equipment at their home”. For example, toys or dolls, slides, swing etc. Parents have understanding as preschools create opportunity children play using different play materials (P5, P6, Group I; P7, P8 from Group II; P15 from Group III).

Many of the FGDs participant parents explained the importance of the ECE in relation to the children later academic achievement, particularly for the language and literacy skills development. Most parents accepted the ideas explained and added their own views that some preschool teachers pay important attention for songs and circle time activities and other preschools give more time for free play in the play field or outside of the classroom. As a result, parents considered as academic areas learning such as reading, writing, arithmetic and math learning time consumed in the play field. Thus, parents give more attention for academic subject areas learning, especially for English language reading and writing because after completion of the primary school 1st cycle [grade 4] children expected to learn nearly all subject matter in English [as instructional language] in SNNPR, except indigenous/local language and Amharic so that most parents expect preschools focused more on English language and literacy skills development (Group I, II & III). On the other hand, many indigenous people require local language [Gede'uffa] to be given side by side Amharic and English for children starting from preschool.

Ongoing discussions with parents carried out were focused on the importance of the ECE/preschool education for the children's holistic learning and development. Nevertheless, they gave more attention for language and literacy skills development. Moreover, participants of FGD also explained that ECE program not only benefit children and families but also benefits the community at large. Hence, ECE basically have economic, political and social values in a child development, specifically at later ages.

As mentioned before, contemporarily preschool education program had been offered in government primary school-based preschool aiming to develop school readiness skills, especially for children who come from poor families. But the program did not able to fulfill the majority of the parents' needs because preschools were provided limited opportunities for the children enrollment. For this reason parents used various cheating mechanisms to find enrollment opportunity for their children in the primary school-based preschools or 'O' levels, for example parents reduce their children ages so this shows that parents have understanding about the values of preschool education.

During FGD described the role and values of preschool education in a various ways depending on their understanding level. But all parent FGD participants agreed on

the importance of the ECE for preschool children before entering primary school and for the later lifelong learning; however, they raised question on accessibility of the ECE because the existing number of preschools are few when compare to the need of the parents to send their children to preschool.

4.1.5. Parent-preschool relationship

One of the subthemes discussed with administrators, teachers and parents was parent-preschool relationships. As the results of this study revealed participants had similar views that parents' awareness towards the values of preschool education increased and they believed that their relationships in children education was the most important issue for the children learning and further academic achievement.

Regarding parent-preschool relationships one of the preschool directors (D5) said that "it is obvious that parents are the child's first and most important teachers". So parent involvement on their children education is unquestionable to strength teacher-parent relationships and to achieve intended preschool education goals. She also stated that they have developed close relationships with parents using different means of communication. For example, they made daily communication with parents offering homework for their children, and in turn parents check their children's progresses and they gave for teachers feedback commenting on the children's' exercise books on the provided spaces or coming to school and discussing face to face with teachers and/or directors because they are aware of such kinds of interactions beforehand when they sent their children to the preschools.

Besides, another director (D6) and teacher (T6) from NGO preschool stated their views regarding parent-preschool relationships that parents who had sent their children to our preschool have made strong relationships with teachers and school personnel. As a result, parents are able to communicate daily with teachers when they bring children to the school and when they take to home. Director (D6) continued that through such kinds of communication parents could discuss and receive information from teachers about their children's daily performance and social behavior... she also tried to clarify her views concerning parent-teacher relationships as follows:

When I talk about parents' relationships...I do not mean that all parents work collaboratively with us concerning their children education. In contrast few parents did not need to work cooperatively with teachers and they require teachers

take all their children's responsibilities ...however we obliged them at least to avail themselves for school meetings at the beginning and end of the school academic year.

Furthermore, director/proprietor interview respondent and parent FGD participants reported that parent-preschool relationships helped to provide preschool education based on the parents interest. When such a kind of mutual understandings developed between preschool and parents, children's learning and developmental activities would be effective (D2, FGD III). Other preschool directors also shared their preschool experiences concerning parent-preschool relationships that:

Of course, our preschools have made a great effort to develop parent-preschool relationship. Accordingly we have enhanced parents' participation in their children's learning and developmental activities using various communication mechanisms. For example, we have meeting with parents in each quarter of academic year to discuss on important issues that preschool are performing and to report children academic and social progresses for parents...even if some parents are not willing to participate in the meetings because traditionally many parents perceived a teacher as the only responsible person for their children learning ((D1, D3, D4).

Teachers also have forwarded almost similar ideas that they have made the meaningful relationships with parents. Thus, teacher-parents relationships or parent involvement in preschool have strengthened preschool performances and enhanced children's self-esteem and self-regulation skills. One of the teachers (T2) described his experiences concerning parent-teacher relationship as follows:

We have good relationship with parents and most of them actively participated in children learning and developmental activities... they help their children at least to do homework and come to school on time providing all necessary materials, snack for break time and lunch. We have also good relationships with parents. For example, when children are unable to do their homework or showed undesirable behavior, we either call parents on telephone or send them written messages so that most parents volunteer to come and discuss with us.

Besides, T1 explained his preschool experiences concerning parents' involvement in their children education and the existing relationships between teachers and parents that [parents perceived their involvement as pertinent means to enhance interaction between the 'school' and home environments to support children learning and development. She also described that:

Most parents of our preschool children's have awareness about the benefits of teacher-parent relationships for the children's academic learning and social

developments...they support their children develop self-regulation and confidence based on the information they have got from preschool... because of positive teacher-parents relationships they also provide supportive learning materials for children at home... when children meet challenges on social behavior and performing their expected activities... we solve the problems working collaboratively with parents. ...homework' is considered as one of the good means of communication to create strong relationships between teachers and parents. Parents also expected in order to support children to do their homework and to sign for the homework done. However, few parents do not volunteer to make relationship with the preschool...they leave all the responsibilities for teachers because of their personal and socio-economic backgrounds.

Teachers have described clearly the relationships they have with parents and parents' participation in their children learning activities. Most parents who have sent their children to the preschools, actively involved in their children learning activities and work collaboratively with preschools. Teacher (T3, T5, T6) interview participants also described their views for the question forwarded by the researcher regarding parents involvement in preschool education that a significant parent-teacher relationships contribute children develop confidence in academic learning activities and during social interaction with their peers and adults that most children social and academically would be achievers because they [children] supported at home, especially in language and literacy skills development.

Teacher (T4) from one of the religious preschool forwarded somehow different views concerning parent participation in their children education that even if parents' awareness is increased about early childhood education, parent-teacher relationship is low. As a result, many parents did not have willingness to come and participate in school meetings during annual and quarterly reports. Besides, most parents of this preschool do not follow up their children's learning activities and progress in education because they do not share their children's responsibility with teachers. Instead, they complain our preschool and teachers when their children failed to compete with other children.

On the other hand parent FGDs results confirmed that like preschool teachers and directors, parent respondents forwarded nearly similar views concerning the importance of parents-preschool relationships for the children's education that most of the parents believed that teacher-parent relationships could contribute for the children learning and development. All participated in FGD agreed that nowadays awareness of the parents towards preschool education had been increased. Some years ago (15) most of the parents

did not know the right age to send their children to school; however, now many children have opportunity to start preschool education depending on the distance of the preschools found and family socio-economic background at least to develop school readiness skills, and majority of the children join grade one at seven (FGD I, II & III). Parent's participants (P12, P16 from FGD III) also added some important points regarding parent-preschool relationships that now most of the parents have awareness about ECE for their children's academic and social developments. Besides, parents also support their children at home revising activities what children learn in preschools and to overcome academic and social challenges in school. Moreover, P3, P6 from Group I expressed views concerning the values of the parent-preschool relationships that parents assisted children to do their homework and how could respect school rules and regulations. However, there were many parents who have not shown willingness to work collaboratively with schools/teachers so as to support their children in academic learning and social skills (self-confidence, independence) because of their low education background and awareness problems. From the same group one of the FGD participants (P4) shared on the issues that had discussed in the group and she added some points that "although most parents work collaboratively with preschools, some parents, especially those who have of low education backgrounds considered schools as solely responsible for their children education".

The parents' involvements in preschool education were different depending on the preschools programs or settings. For example, parents' involvement in government preschool was different from private and NGOs or community preschools. Hence, parent involvement in private preschools was high because most parents are aware of preschool education for their children learning and development. The education fee that they paid is also higher than other programs such as religious and community preschool programs. In contrast parent's involvement in government preschools is less because of parents' socioeconomic background.

Parent participants in FGD were also confirmed such reality and they have described some important points that are able to determined parent participation positively or negatively such as teacher-child relationships, parent's employment, awareness and parent satisfaction on their children education. So they believed that

parents-preschool/teachers positive relationships could enhance and boost activities that promote children's learning and development.

4.1.6. Access for preschool education

Findings from the data analysis indicated that there was ECE policy framework in Ethiopia that has been adapted taking experiences of different countries into the countries context (MOE, 2010) and strategic plan to implement this policy. Early childhood education issues are also clearly mentioned in different policy documents of Ethiopia such as 1994 Education and Training Policy. As stated in national ECCE policy framework, access for pre-school education program for children is focused on the acquisition of basic skills (pre-reading, pre-writing, counting and arithmetic) in preparation for the child's formal schooling. The policies documents also give emphasis ECE to be accessible for children with disabilities/special needs. As mentioned earlier, preschools have shown progress yearly in number; however, it would not be accessible for all children, especially for CWDs. As clearly stated in the ECCE policy framework; however, accessing preschool education opportunities for all including children with disabilities is right and a pertinent issue to bring all around development in such a crucial age and to bring quality in the country education system.

Education administrators view concerning access for preschool education

Even though accessing preschool education opportunity is the "child rights" as mentioned in different policy documents in Ethiopia, this sector was left for NGO, religious organizations and private owners generally in zone level and particularly in Dilla town. Nevertheless, now ECE access for children increased, especially for children of the poor parents in child-to-child and 'O' level programs. Regarding ECE access in the Gedeo zone/Dilla town one of the zone education administrators explained comparing the previous and current situation as follows:

Some years ago early childhood education was offered in two preschools by the support of protestant church because of lack of parents' awareness and lack of education administrators due attention, preschool education opportunity was not offered for a long time in the zone or Dilla town. Now the number of preschools has increased because private investors have shown interest, especially in Dilla town, as is parents' awareness increased towards ECE. Currently we also created early childhood education opportunities for children in government schools. Thus, government gave more consideration for preschool education in order to minimize

the education quality problems from the education system. Accordingly we have started 'O' level program in all primary schools at least in two classrooms.... He continued...in our zone access for preschool education increased in different preschool program types such as non-governmental, community, NGO and "O" classes (primary school based government preschool programs) and child-to-child programs (ZA2)

Similarly Woreda education office administrators described that:

...today, in Dilla town there are more than 20 licensed private, religious and NGO preschools. In addition, government primary school-based preschools or 'O' level program is providing free education for the poor parents of children who could not afford education fee for private school. However, still preschool is not accessible according to parents demand, especially for CWDs (ZA1, ZA2, WA,WA3).

Indeed, preschool education program has been provided in different program levels in Dilla town such as Nursery/PreKG, LKG and Upper KG (first, second and third levels) and child-to-child as well as at 'O' level in order to address preschool needs of the children in the community. Children who have enrolled in government schools have opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills or school readiness skills that enable them [children] to be aware of school behavior. When they enter primary schools they will have adapted the new school environment and easily develop social interaction with other peers and adults.

The education administrators and experts also explained the problem to access preschool education opportunity for all children such as financial, material and trained human resources so as to fulfill parent's demand. As a result parents of low socio-economic background raised question enrollment for preschool education to be increased (ZA1, ZA2). More specifically, one of the experts explained:

Parents need has highly increased to send their children to the government primary school-based preschool program. However, we did not fulfill the parents need ...because there is no special budget, trained teachers and supportive teaching-learning materials as well as extra classrooms. Of course, for the time being it has been started in each government primary school within two classrooms assigning teachers who were teaching in primary schools (WA3).

Other education administrators of zone and Woreda also forwarded their views concerning the role of government in relation to access of preschool education that in the zone or Dilla town most preschools were run by the private and religious organizations, the role of government in private preschools was carrying out quality control and providing experts guide. However, as mentioned earlier currently government has given

more emphasis than previous for preschool education program to overcome the existing quality problem in education system. In order to practically implement preschool education, curriculum and material were prepared by the regional education bureau and it has been distributed for each Woreda including Dilla town administrative education office/Woreda (ZA1, ZA2, WA1,WA2). However, it has met challenges in an implementation stage because of lack of trained teachers and lack of readiness of the preschool to implement this new curriculum.

On the other hand Dilla town administrative officials and education officials were working collaboratively to address preschool education for children from the parents of low socioeconomic background, facilitating special programs in government primary schools, churches, 'Idir' houses and 'kebele' halls assigning volunteer students who have graduated from colleges and universities and came back to their villages and who are unemployed paying pocket money until they will get job opportunities. Woreda also made a great effort to access free ECE for children addressing those children from poor families working collaboratively with community, NGOs, and churches establishing learning centers in each 'kebele [residence]'. Another method which they used to address informal preschool educations was child-to-child/friendship program. This program was carried out according to the local context by the help of teachers and young facilitators who are grade five and six students and teachers so as to prepare young children for the primary school. However, the effectiveness of preschool education is influenced by the lack of trained man power in preschool education and financial problems

Moreover, zone and Woreda education administrators described some important points used to create ECE opportunity for preschool children such as encouraging potential investors to establish private preschools providing license including grace time (3years). However, before they [investors] started Woreda education experts evaluate whether the planned preschool/kindergarten fulfills the national preschool education program standard or not including minimum standards of facilities of physical environment (ZA1, ZA2,WA1, WA2). Besides, Woreda education administrators added more important points concerning license offering process: "If an individual fulfill more than 50%, we give a grace time so as to fulfill the remaining requirements; after that she/he is obliged to terminate license agreement" (WA1, WA2). They also explained that

even if zone and Woreda education administrators made great efforts to access preschool education encouraging private investors, they met challenges to find trained teachers for the preschool education program is more challenging than fulfilling other requirements. It is the main problem for the investors in accessing preschool education in general in the zone and particularly in the Dilla town because there is no institute which provided training to produce capable preschool teachers in the regional or zone levels.

Today, in Ethiopia's, government has given attention preschool education to be accessible for all preschool children including CWDs. Accordingly, rules and regulations have come from MOE down to regional education bureau that gives responsibilities to develop and modify the national curriculum according to the zone and Woreda cultural context. Accordingly, the regional education bureau has developed integrated preschool play-based curriculum based on the national curriculum but it is not modified in zone and Dilla administrative town/Woreda cultural context. Regarding the current situation of preschool education opportunities, education officials said:

Really, today parents' awareness is highly increased to preschool education after primary school-based or 'O' level free preschool education program has been started for those parents who cannot pay private preschool education fee. As a result, now so many parents are raising questions preschool education opportunity could be accessible for their children. Besides, zone/administrative town are being cash crop producing areas so many parents participated in different small business activities. For this reason they meet difficulties to look after their children. That is why parents prefer sending their children to preschools and they consider preschool as a better place for care and education (ZA1, ZA2, WA1, D7, D8).

Similar ideas were forwarded by the Woreda education administrators (WA1, WA2, WA3) and they stated that primary school-based preschool education becomes more beneficial to access free preschool education program, especially for the children who are coming from parents of low socio-economic background. However, so many parents have requested "O" level preschool education program to be accessible. "...now it is difficult to increase the number of preschool or classrooms because we do not have special budge to this program and trained man power in order to fulfill parents need (WA2, WA2). They continued that:

For the time being this program has started in two classrooms in each government primary school in the Woreda level of Dilla town half a day program... because children who have come from such families look for food to stay the whole day in school. But schools did not have feeding program for those children who are coming from low socio-economic background families.

Furthermore, the zone and Woreda education administrators/officials interview participants were asked how licenses were offered for interested individuals or groups

wanting to establish preschool in order to access preschool education in the zone/ Dilla administrative town and to know what preschool education standard they used. Accordingly, they replied that they have set prerequisites in order to offer license for persons who are interested to open preschool according the national preschool education program standard and based on the community needs. Zone education administrator (ZA1) stated:

In our zone license for the interested groups/individuals to invest on preschool education is offered based on the (MOE, 2009) national preschool education program standards...and taking community context into consideration. According to the national education program standard 'Woreda' education office is responsible to offer license. I think ... "the requirements to establish pre-school is.... available trained manpower, materials, conducive physical environment and other relevant resources and infrastructure should be taken into consideration"... of course prerequisites are clearly listed step by step in the document...interested groups also expected to fulfill this legal requirements.

Another zone education expert (ZA2) shared similar ideas saying that license was offered for interested persons capable of meeting the national preschool program standard. Accordingly, many private owners obtained license and consequently many pre-schools were opened; however, those preschools which have established preschools did not fulfill the stated national requirements and they have quality problem because zone and Woreda education administrators focused on access rather than quality.

On the other hand Woreda education administrators(WA1,WA2, WA3) stated that they made great efforts to access preschool opportunities 'for all children' in the community. They said:

We encourage interested group and individual establish preschool education...we offer license even if an interested person or group would not fully fulfill hundred percent of the requirement". However, interested groups/individuals are obliged to have at least adequate preschool compound, important materials and equipment, trained teachers and basic important resources expected to be available to start the program. For example, if an individual is able to fulfill 50% or above of the requirements, we give a grace time to fulfill the remaining requirements within interval of three years. Thus, we give time they are able to fulfill available materials and trained teachers step by steps during pre-licensed time (grace time) for 3 years and full license time after 3 years practices. If an individual became capable enough within 3 years if they fulfill the requirements they will get full license...otherwise, they do not get full license. So our major aim is to access opportunity of early childhood education for preschool children.

As interview results showed; however, most of the licensed preschool did not fulfilled the national or regional preschool standards because of shortage of financial, material and human resources.

4.1.7. Resources availability and support system

Zone education department and Woreda education office administrators reported that they have already offered requirements for the private, NGOs and religious preschools so as to fulfill human and materials resources according to the national preschool education program standard.

Capable human resources are indispensable in order to access quality ECE for preschool children, especially trained human resources are major input in any educational institutions particularly for preschool education program. Accordingly ZA1 explained: “As a zone education department... we do not have mandate to hire preschool teachers or other personnel...the mandate is the preschool themselves...” However, Woreda education office could make follow up whether the teachers hired according to the preschool education program standard requirements or not, especially this happen after teachers’ recruitment were carried out in the preschools. He continued that:

...I think preschool teachers expected to be certified from any preschool teacher training institutions or should have teaching experiences in preschool...she/he has to be healthy, interested to serve in the preschool, and should fulfill other prerequisites that preschools required.

Likewise, ZA2, WA1,WA3 expressed their views concerning the competence of the preschool teachers that national preschool education policy allows untrained teachers to serve as the assistant teachers. Nevertheless, “in some conditions they act as trained teachers”. Thus, this is a major problem in most preschools because there are no preschool teacher training institutes that are able to produce capable trained teachers at the zone or regional level for preschool/kindergarten. As a result, preschools have challenged to find trained teachers who would stay for a long time in the preschools because teachers “turnover” is high because of searching for better environments and payment or salary except teachers in NGO and community preschools because relatively they pay better salary when compared to other preschools (WA1). This in turns highly affected preschool education quality, particularly in religious preschools.

Furthermore, WA2 and ZA1 stated that although preschool teachers required to be trained in preschool education and be competent, finding trained teachers was not easy in this area so that the set requirement may be failed and “temokiro” or experiences would be taken into account as a requirement to hire preschool teachers. They also continued that in case of government primary school-based preschool programs [‘O’ levels] it was difficult to hire trained teachers because there is no initially determined salary scale in the government schools for preschool teachers. For this reason schools were expected to assign experienced teachers from primary schools, unless trained teachers would be hired for a time being with 400 Birr (\$ 20) per a month.

The same type of interview question was forwarded for preschool directors/proprietors concerning teachers’ recruitment requirements to hire teachers and challenges in their preschools in order to accessing quality ECE for preschool children. One of the directors/proprietors explained that:

We have requirements to hire preschool teachers depending on our school context...accordingly persons who would be teachers in our preschools should be certified from the preschool/kindergarten teachers training institutes ... they have to be healthy, free of any addictions, undesirable behaviors...hence, they are expected to have empathetic behavior and commitment to serve children in the preschool (D2).

For the question that was forwarded by the researcher, ‘what kinds of support your preschool have got from zonal education bureau and Dilla town administrative education office/Woreda education office to facilitate ECE provision’, directors and teachers from private preschools stated that zone education department and Woreda/town administrative education office are expected to work collaboratively with preschools in order to provide expertise support and to carry out quality control, and evaluate curriculum implementation because they have responsibilities to make decisions that the government rules and regulations to be implemented in the preschools. Director (D2, T2) said that rules and regulations come from Woreda education office down to preschools and inspectors make follow up to check whether the rules and regulations implemented or not. Besides, inspectors visit monthly to the preschool to check how education provision was carried out and to evaluate curriculum implementation in relation to the lesson plan. Nevertheless, the main objective of the evaluation is simply to look whether the curriculum activities coincide to the daily lesson plan. However, there are no any

observable supports from zone education department and Woreda education office like opportunity for in-service training programs or other supports which are given by the zone education department and/or Woreda education office. Similar views were forwarded by another private preschool director/proprietor and teacher (D1, T1) saying that:

Woreda education office inspectors would carry out quality control regarding the teaching-learning activities and check whether the new play-based curriculum implemented or not..., and they [inspectors] comment our weakness and strengths after observation has taken place ...otherwise there is no any observable resource (material and financial) supports from Zone or Woreda.

On the other hand concerning supports that expected from Zone education department and Woreda education office, NGO preschool director and teacher (D6&T6) explained that they were working cooperatively with zone education department and Woreda education office in some important common issues like new curriculum implementation, human resource development and quality issues. However, the preschool did not need any resource supply from zone education department or Woreda education office; of course they have smooth and strong relationships because they have discussed in common philosophy of preschool education that help them to provide quality ECE for preschool children. Actually there is no government policy, rules and regulations at least to support providing in-service program opportunity for teachers from NGOs, private and religious preschools rather than government schools. In order to implement common curriculum teachers should have got in-service training opportunity in the same institute so that government should work collaboratively with NGOs, private and religious preschools. Director (D6) also described concerning the relationships that the preschool have with zone education department and Woreda education office:

We are working cooperatively with Woreda education office and zone education department concerning quality issue. ...the Woreda education office evaluates our activities according to their requirements and they also provide experts advices because we follow both national and international (Montessori) preschool philosophy and implement play-based curriculum activities or hands-on learning method. ...we do not expect other supports in cash or in kind. But we need Woreda and zone education administrators' support to find 'land'...because we need land to expand classroom to accommodate more children. However, there is problem to find land to build additional classrooms... still we are negotiating with town administrative officials to find land because we need preschool education to be accessible 'for all children', especially for children of the poor parents.

Other respondents from one of the religious preschools explained that, Woreda education office has offered license and work collaboratively with the preschool in curriculum implementation and control when curriculum activities were implemented in the preschool. Hence, the experts would also carry out evaluation to identify strength and weakness of the preschool activities and provide constructive comments (D5, T5). The director and teacher also stated that, “we have experience sharing program with other preschools and we also share our experiences for others because we almost fulfilled Woreda office requirements that are expected from a given preschool program so that the ‘preschool’ is working cooperatively with zone education department and Woreda education office to provide quality ECE for children.

Furthermore, directors and teachers (D7, T7) from government primary school-based preschool or ‘O’ level explained that they work cooperatively with Woreda/town administrative education office to provide free preschool education for the children of poor parents. Inspectors also support their program giving professional advice and paying monthly 800 Birr for two teachers (400Birr or \$ 20 for each teacher). T7 states that, “we have direct administrative chain with Woreda education office... but they do not have allocated especial budget to support the program and facilitating school learning environment...” so Woreda support was low because they did not attempt to facilitate conducive teaching-learning environment for both teachers and children. Of course, they have carried out inspection and pay monthly 400Birr for the preschool teachers...but it does not clearly identify whether it is ‘salary or allowance’. As interview and observation result showed teachers were not motivated because of two crucial challenges: less payment which could not cover a week basic needs; large class size (more than 70 children in a class. On the other hand teacher (T8) from another government school (H) mentioned similar views and added some points concerning Woreda education office supports that inspectors come and observe the situations in the class room and how teaching-learning activities were influenced by the large class size and lack of resources, but they did not take any positive measures. She also claimed the directors who have given her the crowded classroom (170). She continued:

I have diploma in social science...I was teaching in grade 5...however, the director assigned me to teach in the ‘O’ level classroom....because preschool program started without preplanned lack of necessary resources like trained

teacher, material and facilities. Hence, concerned Woreda education office did not allocate special budget to support the program. However, Woreda inspectors monthly come to visit the school... they enter into classroom and look round the classroom, time table on the wall and look weekly lesson plan...but there are no changes that they brought practically to facilitate teaching-learning activities ...still 170 children are learning in a small school hall...but children who have got such an opportunity are beneficial compared to those children who have not got such kind of opportunity in academic achievement when both of them entered primary school.

In general preschools have met various problems to address appropriate ECE and to implement the new national/regional preschool curriculum because of lack of financial, material and trained human resources. Besides, weak support system of zone education department and Woreda education office to upgrade teachers' education has made a great influence to provide appropriate preschool education.

4.1.8. Awareness and attitudes of the participants' towards education of CWDs

Parents, teachers and administrators awareness and attitudes are crucial factors in accessing preschool education for CWDs. All children including children with disabilities have right to learn and live in society in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) including the right to non-discrimination which was ratified by the Ethiopian government in 1991. Thus, preschool education for children with or without disabilities is 'right' as Ethiopia ratified in 1991. Finding of the study; however, showed that children with disabilities have been discriminated from education program and other social services because of lack of awareness of the stakeholders (parents, community, teachers and preschool administrators). Thus, children with disabilities/special needs were not included in any types of preschool education program such as private, because of awareness problems about the causes of disabilities. That is, administrators' attitude towards education of children with disabilities and causes of disabilities was negative. As interview and observation results showed zone education department and Woreda education office administrators did not make any efforts to include children with disabilities in preschool education programs. As the zone education department and Woreda education office administrators explained, they did not have plan to include children with disabilities(CWDs) in preschool program ECE because of awareness problem towards education of CWDs.

Moreover, interview with preschools directors, teachers and parents showed that they were not aware of the causes of disabilities and education of CWDs. As a result, preschools were not ready to access preschool education and admit children with observable disabilities. Accordingly one of the directors from private preschools stated:

Somehow I have understanding as to children with disabilities ...but we do not have children with identified disabilities in our preschool because none of the parents came and requested our preschool when registration was carried out...even if they would come...we are not ready to admit children with disabilities, especially our preschool being a private preschool [profit based]...it is very difficult for us to treating and training them [CWDs]... because it [CWDs program] requires extra man power, materials and money so that including CWDs in our preschool program is 'wastage' and time consuming.... For these reasons even though parents send their disabled children to our school...now we are not ready to admit them (D1).

Preschool director/proprietor and teacher from the same private preschool also had shared similar views regarding preschool education access for CWDs for the question what was raised during interview and why they did not provide education opportunities for the children with disabilities, they explained as follows:

Traditionally people have negative attitude and awareness problem towards CWDS. As a result, they considered some disabilities as communicable diseases. ...if we admit children with disabilities like children with epilepsy seizure and mental retardation... other parents of children with non-disabilities might not send their children to our preschool. ...even if CWDS come to enter our preschool ... by any means we do not admit those children who are with such kinds of disabilities because people considered as caused by the evil spirit, unless government regulations will force us. I think now none of the preschools recommitted to admit CWDs because of lack of forceful policy, lack of people awareness and trained teachers (D1, T1).

Preschools, especially private preschools are not ready to admit children with disabilities because of their awareness problem and fear of other parents' children without disabilities. Parents of children without disabilities have negative attitude towards children with disability and causes of disabilities. Besides, the absence of forceful government policy in the regional or zone level have contribute children with disabilities not to be included in a given classroom with other children in the research area and this in turn has created open gap for preschools not to admit children with disabilities.

Moreover, the interview results showed that *all preschool directors/proprietors did not have only awareness problem, but also they have attitude problem towards*

children with disabilities, especially private preschools thought how they make profit rather than admitting and supporting children with disabilities. Thus, preschools were not ready to enroll children with disabilities in the formal preschool settings. It is argued that although preschools are forced by the rule and regulations children with disabilities to be admitted in formal preschool settings, people awareness and currently existing preschool environments are not convenient for children with disabilities. It is not manageable because there were facilities problems in preschools such as buildings, preschool compounds and classrooms physical environment as well as there were no assistive devices and materials.

Accordingly, a question was raised for one of the private preschool's directors (D2) regarding awareness and attitudes of his preschool staff to create ECE opportunity for CWDs. He replied as follows:

...we have awareness concerning the importance of preschool education program for children with disabilities.... So we have a few children with physical disabilities in primary school but still preschool education opportunities for CWDs were not created considerably except a girl 12 years old with mental problem in UKG and we are helping her working cooperatively with her parents... However, so many parents do not have awareness to send their children with disabilities to preschool.

As finding of the study revealed access of preschool education for CWDs was not created in all research participant preschools. Regarding lack of preschool education opportunity for CWDs, one of the religious preschools directors (D4) replied that still there were no parent of children with disability who came and requested in our preschool to enroll their children with identified disabilities. She continued that "we admit if parents of CWDs would come and pay education fee. She was also asked a question how they would ready to admit CWDs. She replied saying that "I think without preplan it will be challenge for us to admit and provide education including with other children". Similarly the NGO preschool director (D6) and teacher (T6) described concerning access of preschool education for CWDs and their awareness and attitudes towards children with disabilities as follows:

Although we have awareness and positive attitude towards CWDs, we did not establish preplan to access preschool education for CWDS because parents and the community have negative attitude towards people with disabilities...my attitude is different from what the communities have concerning CWDs. I believe that people with disabilities can learn if we create conducive learning

environments and provide significant supports in school and at their home. I think it is possible to provide education to CWDs including in the preschool program but we did not make any efforts to access ECE for CWDs....now I take this idea as an assignment to include in our future plan.

Moreover, director (D5) from one of the religious preschools also had explained almost similar views like (D6, T6) and she also added some points that:

When we think about preschool education opportunity for children with disabilities we have to consider obstacles that may hinder to include those [CWDs] in the preschool education program such as people awareness problem and negative attitude towards persons with disabilities. Thus people lack of awareness and negative attitude have affected education of CWDs. So in order to provide ECE for CWDs...awareness raising program concerning causes of disabilities for the community is indispensable otherwise it is impossible to think about the education of children with disabilities in preschool setting.

As mentioned earlier government primary schools have created free preschool education or 'O' level program opportunities for those children who come from the poor families. However, this program did not include children with any types of disabilities because schooling children with disabilities was an unknown issue in the community so that the preschool did not have any plan to 'accept or reject' children with disabilities. Besides, another government school director and teacher (D8, T8) were asked concerning the access of preschool education for CWDs and people awareness and attitude towards education of children with disabilities. Accordingly, they have reported that there were no children with disabilities in their preschool or "O" level program because the community (including school community) has awareness problems and negative attitude concerning children with disabilities. Director (D8) also expressed his views as follows:

I have served as a teacher and director for many years in school but I have not ever seen children with identified disabilities who come to our school except children with motor (limb) problems who do not require others support to move and sit. ...even if we provide education opportunity for CWDs, parents do not dare to send their children to school because of fear of social stigma of the community, instead they prefer to hide in their home out of the people sight.

Teachers' awareness and attitudes towards education of CWDs were not different from that of the directors. Preschool teacher participants do not have awareness about education 'right' of children with disabilities because they did not have ever met children with disabilities in their preschool teaching experiences. Teachers(T3) from one of the religious preschools explained that parents of children with disabilities did not have knowledge to send their children to preschool because of awareness problem and people

negative attitudes towards the causes of disabilities...for example some kinds of disability problems are considered as demonic and other also considered as communicable diseases so that people feel fear of such conditions and ...even some people do not dare to touch children with an epilepsy seizure and mental retardation so that parents did not allow children with such kinds of problem to move out of their homes (T3,T4).

Other teachers also argued that creating early childhood education opportunity for CWDs in current existing situation was not easy because children who are with different learning problems require conducive learning environments and professionals teachers involvement so that finding professionals are also another problem and costly. Indeed, education of CWDs might require well planned and organized preschool environment, awareness and readiness of preschool administrators, teachers, and commitment of education administrative official. Furthermore, traditionally people negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities also make parents feel fear of social stigma to send their children with disabilities to preschools.

On the other hand parents who have participated in the FGDs had shared almost similar views like interview participants did regarding ECE opportunity for preschool children with disabilities that parents never think to send their children with disabilities to preschool because of lack of awareness about education of children with disabilities and fear of social stigma as well as traditionally people held negative attitude towards people with disabilities. Thus, people consider some disabilities as communicable diseases and caused by evil spirit. Alike other interview respondents' parents from FGDs described that:

Our community have awareness problem including me...many people do not respect children with disabilities as being capable of learning and living independently like other children... similarly teachers and administrators have negative attitude towards children with disabilities...as a result preschools are not ready to admit children with disabilities(P7, P9 from Group II). As I am a 'part of the community'... I understood that parents never think their children with disabilities are able to learn because there is no awareness raising program for the community concerning education of children with disabilities... however, these are not only parents' awareness problem, but also preschool directors/owners awareness problem and teachers too. Moreover, education administrators' do not give due attention for children with disabilities to be included in preschool education program (P8, P10 from Group II& P3, P5, P6 from Group II).

Moreover, parents from FGD Group II stated that children with disability might be obtained opportunities to formal preschool education if stakeholders have awareness about causes of disabilities and education of children with disabilities. All interview participants in Group I, II&III) have agreed that *parents did not allow children with disabilities to be seen elsewhere out of their houses and children with disabilities were hidden out of people sight by their parents because of fear of social stigma. As a result, parents of children with disabilities feel fear to make social interaction with their neighborhood...even if people welcome them [parents' of CWDs] to participate in 'cultural coffee ceremony' they could not be confident enough to make social interaction because the causes of disabilities are considered by the community as caused by curse, ancestral anger and fate. So, for the parents who are living under such cultural influence, thinking about education opportunity of CWDS could not be easy (GFD, Group I, Group II & Group III).*

Parent participants also suggested that unless community, administrators, teachers and parents have awareness regarding education of children with disabilities and the causes of disabilities, CWDs will not obtain education opportunity, especially in regular preschool settings like other non-disable children. If preschools become positive to admit children with disabilities, parents/ caregiver would not show willingness to send their children to preschool because they considered as their children with disabilities exposed to other people sights and unable to learn (FGD from Group III). Eventually parents suggested that education administrators and government officials should facilitate preschool education program for CWDs providing awareness arising programs through different mass Medias and allocating special budgets to facilitate preschool learning environment.

4.2. Appropriateness of the Curricula Practiced in Preschools

Here findings have addressed in responses to the research questions (2&3): What do participants demand children to learn for their holistic development/learn more in preschools? What type of curriculum are the preschools using and how is it implemented? Under these questions eight themes were analyzed as follows. These are: *1) curricula for the children's holistic learning and development; 2) beliefs children learn to their holistic development; 3) demand children learn more in preschool;*

4) participants awareness of kinds of curricula preschools use and the new play based curriculum; 5) knowledge for the sources of the curricula in use; 6) linkage of curriculum preschools use with national curriculum guide; 7) resistance to implement the new play-based curriculum; 8) curricula practices in classroom (teachers-centred, lecture method, whole group activities; matching etc.)

4.2.1. The curricula for the children's holistic learning and development

Current preschool policy framework (MOE, 2010) and national curriculum guide (MOE, 2010; 2009) give particular emphasis for the children's holistic learning and development in all aspects of socio-emotional, physical, cognitive etc. should be equally targeted in the preschool program through collaboration of parents, community and preschools in order to be implemented effectively in preschools. Although numbers of preschool have increased year to year, the access of preschool education is still low when compared to the current parents' needs to send their children in the study area. Moreover, the following question was employed to gather information through interview and observation.

Do curricula practiced by the preschools address children's holistic learning and development?

Regarding this question the interview and observation results had shown that most preschools have provided education that are able to contribute somehow for the children holistic learning and development (social, emotional, physical and cognitive) because learning activities were provided in most preschools through planned and unplanned(daily routines) learning activities. However, a few preschools mainly focused on basic literacy and numeracy skills development using confined classroom teacher-centered teaching-learning activities. The interview participant directors and teachers were asked what they did in order to promote children's holistic learning and development in the classroom and out of the classroom. Accordingly the director and teachers from religious preschools explained that they had understanding about benefits of the academic and non-academic curriculum activities for the children holistic learning and development. Director from the same preschool said that "we have provided both academic and non-academic learning and developmental activities which are able to contribute for the children's holistic learning and development". Teacher (T1) also

explained that because of traditional views of parents, subject based education like literacy, language and age appropriate mathematical operation were intensively provided in the preschool because ‘preschool’ and parents beliefs that academic learning areas promote children to be highly competent in school. On the other hand traditionally preschools focused competence based ECE program of reading and writing [English] and arithmetic based on their own curriculum activities but as it has mentioned earlier preschools did not have used national or regional curriculum guide. However, national curriculum guide was used in one of the private preschool modifying and combining with other academic based curriculum materials which are purchased from market. Director (D2) from the same private preschool described that:

As I understood national curriculum guide is play-based/child-centered which are able to address children’s “all-rounded development”: physical, social, emotional and cognitive. However, now we are implementing both play-based and academic subject area curricula such as math, reading and writing supporting with play materials... both Amharic and English are used as the instructional media in order to promote children’s basic literacy and numeracy skills...significant times were also allotted for art and music, sport, storytelling and other outdoor play activities corresponding to the national curriculum and preschool education program standard.

For the same question which was raised by the researcher concerning the curricula that preschools practiced whether it address children’s holistic learning and development or not, one of the teachers from the same preschool have shared similar views and added some points that they had appropriately scheduled and provided academic and non-academic areas learning, particularly providing developmental activities such as circle time (storytelling & play games) and free play, especially outdoor play activities in the manner that fosters children’s physical, social and cognitive development but child-initiated play activities were not carried out in the classroom because the classroom was small to arrange play materials (T2). She also continued saying:

Of course in our preschool child-initiated or child-centered activities were taken place in the play field with the teacher close follow up to manage the large number of children ...usually children come with new different traditional play games and stories ...we facilitate to engage the children in the play actively or play games they brought from their home in addition to our program, especially during circle time. They are also eager to listen and tell traditional stories keeping their turn. However, all academic teaching-learning activities are carried out in the classroom with the help of teachers teaching materials/aides.

Many interview participant preschool directors and teachers believed that curricula that they use from different sources adapting in their preschool contexts were appropriate for the children's learning and development. Accordingly director (D3) from one of the religious preschools explained:

I hope the curricula we use are appropriate to promote children holistic development because consideration for academic, social/emotional, moral, aesthetic developmental activities have equally given in our preschool. ...for example we facilitate outdoor and indoor play activities according to the allotted time to support children's holistic development based on our curriculum contents, goals and objectives ...our preschool usually facilitates positive learning environment where children are able to participate actively in learning and developmental activities. Teachers play the role of guiding and facilitating children during outdoor and indoor play activities.

As observed, children in the above mentioned religious preschool learn both academic and developmental activities with the help of teachers guide in natural and built environment so as to promote children's learning and development. In contrast children in government school did not have any outdoor play materials such as slide, swinging, climbing, but teachers made their own efforts to help children engaged in physical and social/emotional development during free play time, circle time and large group/the whole group activities time. The government schools were not facilitated to promote children's holistic learning and development because of lack of trained teachers in the preschools. Besides, directors did not have awareness for the activities that are necessary for the children learning and development. They only control teacher's attendance, and they were not committed to support teachers, especially to support those teachers who were working without salary, but with allowance of 400Birr (\$ 20) per a month because Woreda had given low attention for "O" level even if they try to create opportunity for those children who have not got chance for the preschool.

On the other hand preschool directors and teachers were asked what efforts they made in order to address children's holistic learning and development. Accordingly they [D1, D2, D5, D6] described that their preschools curricula/education provision aimed to promote children's all-round development facilitating adequate learning environment that are able to encourage them [children] to explore and experience that are able to make sense of the world around them[children] in both classrooms and out of the classrooms.

In addition, director/proprietor and teacher from one of the private preschools (A) explained that:

We use both academic and play-based curriculum based in our preschool curriculum objectives in order to promote children's holistic learning and development.... Besides, reading writing, arithmetic and science are provided ...while developmental learning areas also provided in the preschool including activities that are able to help all-rounded developmental areas: physical (motor), social/emotional development, language and communication are the major learning and developmental areas in our preschool (D1, T1).

Teachers (T2, T5) also shared similar ideas that learning and developmental activities were undertaken integrating academic and play-based so as to promote children's holistic learning and development. Thus, academic and non-academic learning activities had been provided side by side in order to support children's learning and development. For example, counting with English words (one two three...); storytelling to the language and communication (teachers reading English story books, explaining the main ideas; asking and answering). Such kinds of approaches likely encouraged social interaction among the children, and between the teacher and children.

Similarly, D6 her preschool experiences that the learning and developmental activities/education provision was carried out depending on the program types like, PreKG, LKG and UKG and activities which carried out were play-based. She also explained that in all preschool programs classrooms they have applied 'Montessori learning method' in order to promote children's holistic learning and development. Accordingly, children were encouraged to learn independently based on their own interest using different play materials which help them to develop significant concepts. In addition, one of the teachers from the same preschool (T6) described how the curriculum the preschool implemented was appropriate that the 'preschool' had followed play-based curriculum approaches based on children age levels, capacities and abilities to promote children's learning and developmental activities such as free play, music and movements side by side to the academic areas. She also justified the appropriateness of the play-based curriculum for children's holistic learning and development:

Play-based curriculum is crucial issue for the children's holistic learning and development because children naturally require activities that are able to facilitate physical, social/emotional and intellectual developments so that we have implemented both play-based and academic area curricula according to the children age group (T6).

Of course curricula that are provided in NGO school are appropriate for children learning and development the ‘preschool’ practically implemented play-based learning activities that encourage children to explore their environment and learn according to their choices using modern play materials that available inside the classroom and outside the classrooms. However, in other preschools the curricula practiced somehow were not appropriate for children learning and development.

4.2.2. Participants beliefs children learn to their holistic development

Although director/proprietors and teacher interview participants believed as they had addressed children’s holistic learning and development, most preschools had been challenged in order to ensure children’s holistic learning and development due to unavailability of resources [material, human and financial]. Thus, they have limitations to fully address children’s holistic learning and development. As a result, curricula that had been implemented in the preschools are divided up separately into academic areas focusing on math, language and science. While in some preschools literacy and numeracy focused activities are given. That is, curriculum activities are carried out using predetermined time table instead of implementing child-initiated/play-based curricula. For example, the community preschool has given more attention for separated subject area learning because of large class size, inappropriate teaching and learning textbooks, unavailability of sufficient play materials and lack of extra classroom to establish integrated learning centers. Accordingly, director (D5) from the community preschool explained that teaching separated subject matter was dominant in the preschool because of prepared academic focused curriculum materials (textbooks) and teachers traditionally developed teaching experiences. Even if there was the regional play-based curriculum that was prepared by the regional education bureau, teachers and directors were not aware of the importance of this curriculum for children’s learning and development. If this curriculum was practically applied in all preschools it would have played a great role in holistic learning and development of the children. As mentioned earlier, the directors and teachers did not obtain training concerning the new play-based curriculum.

Although preschool education curriculum framework in Ethiopia is designed in the manner that are able to promote “holistic” development of the child (MOE, 2010; MOE, 2009) aiming to prepare children for formal schooling, as this study findings

showed, preschools allotted more time for the separated subject areas teaching-learning because parents and ‘preschool’ traditionally are influenced by the academic subject matters, especially language, literacy and arithmetic skills development.

One of the religious preschool teachers (T4) explained that they were usually strived to integrate learning across developmental domains:

physical, social/emotional and cognitive through indoor and outdoor play activities because children did not stay for a long time on the chair in a given classroom...for this reason teachers create different play opportunities taking children to the play field ...but parents did not feel happy when they saw children out of the classroom for a long time for fear of accident and strong sunlight otherwise they believe in the importance of play for children physical and social development. However, parents are ambitious about their children learning reading, writing, counting and singing starting from the preKG otherwise the preschools considered as bad.

As finding of this study revealed; however, parents gave more emphasis academic areas learning in all preschool programs, particularly in the private preschools. Accordingly, director (D2) explained that as their preschool school is being private preschool; they were obliged to give more emphasis for academic learning areas because the strength and weakness of a preschool has been evaluated by their parents based on the children’s academic achievement. He also described:

In deed appropriate preschool education should be aimed to promote children’s learning and developmental domains... so, we give important considerations to foster children’s social, physical, aesthetic skills development even if we focus more on the academic learning areas (reading, writing and math) through play.

On the other hand teacher interview participants from religious preschool had expressed their belief that in their preschools both academic and play-based learning activities were implemented, by giving particular focus for academic areas. Accordingly, teachers (T3 &T4) described their belief and practices that more of academic subject areas were provided in the classroom supporting through play games, singing, teaching aids... so these activities were also provided incorporating with outdoor free play activities. However, most of the academic learning activities were carried out in the classroom such as math, language and science based on the daily lesson plan. T3 continued that the English language and arithmetic have been given more consideration because the ‘preschool’ and parents were given more demand for academic areas. She said “the parents also believed preschools which are used English as an instructional language considered as the best preschool...” For this reasons English is used as an

instructional media in this preschool. Hence, parents also give similar consideration for academic oriented skills development than nonacademic learning skills development. As the parents in the FGD reflected their concerns were also their children would be academically successful. In general most parents believed that their children would be competent enough in literacy and language (communication) when they enter school. However, many interview participant administrators believed children learn both academic and nonacademic activities based on the play-based curriculum.

4.2.3. Participants ‘demands their children learn more in preschool

As mentioned earlier teachers, parents and preschool administrators demanded children learn more of academic areas. Hence, parents traditionally belief academic learning areas to be prioritized for their children. Although directors and teachers believed as both academic and nonacademic teaching-learning were equally provided for children, due attention were given for academic areas because parents were more interested their children learn, especially language, literacy and math(D1, D3). This is to say that parents were more interested in children’s being smart and competent in academic areas in school. Even if play-based approach was considered as time consuming by some parents (those who have sent their children to preschool), some teachers and directors believe that play-based learning as promotes children’s holistic learning and development. Others also considered play-based learning as structured or unstructured traditional play activities that had been carried out in the play field such as group play, pair and individual play with the help of teachers or without (D1, T1, T2). However, teachers also prefer teaching more of academic areas because there were no facilities for the play-based learning activities, but they taught supporting ‘with play’ games.

On the other hand regarding parents demands their children to learn more in preschool, directors and teachers explained that parents have expected their children to learn more of literacy and language (communication). They [D4, T4, D2, T2] also state that:

Although we allotted more time for teaching academic areas like language and math, we try to support children to learn combining academic learning with nonacademic (aesthetics: sport, music and art) taking parents interest into consideration because parents highly require their children would be competent in academic areas, especially math, language and literacy... even though we do not

have enough outdoor play materials and equipment, we let children to engage actively in free play activities in our preschool natural environment for a short period of time because parents claim if children stay for a long time in the play field...

As observation and interview findings revealed most preschools had given more consideration for the academic areas learning because as mentioned before parents demanded their children would be competent enough in further education. Teachers also work hard in order to fulfill parents demands giving special focuses to their children learn more of language and literacy, especially reading and writing because those children who are learning in primary (2nd cycle) and secondary schools usually meet challenges to read and write English; “sometimes they were forced for dropping out because of shortage of English language understanding/communication problem”. Hence, English is the instructional media (southern part of the Ethiopia) starting from 2nd cycle of the primary school. So parents are very ambitious their children to develop basic English reading and writing skills starting from the preschool so that most teachers’ times were occupied by the academic subject area teaching-learning activities in the preschools (D1,D2,T1,T2,T3). Even if parents believed preschool education provision would be focused on academic areas, teachers have believed play as a natural phenomenon for children health physical, social and cognitive development. Accordingly, preschools have allotted time for outdoor free play activities. However, because of lack of available spaces in the classroom and shortage of play materials, in most preschools free play activities were not carried out in the classrooms.

On the other hand interview participants from Woreda education administrators and parent FGD participants explained that even if preschool education is aimed to address all-rounded development of the children focusing on the play-based curriculum in the facilitated supportive learning environment, parents and preschools given more emphasis for the academic learning areas. These areas are also traditionally, more preferable areas of learning by the community; however, Woreda had made close follow up both academic areas and play-based teaching-learning activities to be implemented in all preschools (WA1, WA3, FGD Group I&II). Hence, both play-based and academic areas teaching-learning activities are considered as equally important for the children learning and development in most preschools. For example, in the classroom play games,

music and movement, singing, storytelling were provided side by side with academic areas learning activities(T6,T5, P16) .Besides, P16 suggested some points that:

Since parent are interested their children to learn more reading and writing English and arithmetic, education experts should have recommend both academic and play-based curriculum to be implemented, preschools should bring both curricula side by side in the manner that promote children's learning and development(P16).

Moreover, other Woreda interview participants described why preschools focused on academic areas:

National/regional preschool curriculum is flexible...preschools can modify as necessary as possible depending on their preschool context...; However, some preschools did not have competent/trained teachers to modify the core curriculum into their preschool situation and cultural context in the ways that are able to support for the children's learning and development...this might be also one of the causes for preschools focusing more of academic areas (WA2, WA3).

Preschool directors and teachers also described that parents who have sent their children to the preschools did not mind about play-based learning rather they would feel happy when their children read and write in English and doing simple mathematical operations (D3, D4, T3.T4). In general all interview participant have described 'preschools' give more consideration for academic areas teaching-learning activities because parents demanded their children to learn more of academic areas in preschool, especially more emphasis were given for reading, writing and arithmetic. As observation and document analysis revealed that the existing preschool curriculum materials are more of academic areas focused and preschools have also give more consideration for separated subject based teaching-learning activities.

4.2.4. Participants' awareness kinds of curricula preschools use and the new play based curriculum

Zone and Woreda education administrators had explained their views regarding the question that the researcher forwarded about the appropriateness of the curriculum preschools practiced in relation to the preschool policy and the new curriculum implementation, because they have mandate to develop, disseminate and evaluate the curricula that are practiced in preschools and to provide important experts knowledge, materials inputs and to facilitate training for teachers. However, they have different levels of understanding concerning the appropriateness of the curricula used in preschools because of their experts' knowledge. Accordingly, interview respondents from

Zone education department explained their beliefs that the curricula preschools used were ‘appropriate’, because preschool curriculum that was prepared in the regional education bureau is available in each preschools. The findings of the interviews and observation revealed; however, they did not have awareness whether the appropriate curricula practically implemented or not, so they have doubt concerning the curriculum used at the implementation stage. One of the zone education department experts stated:

In our zone all preschool are following the new integrated curriculum guide that was prepared in the regional education bureau and we passed regulation for all Woreda education office the curriculum to be implemented in all preschools based on the preschools context. I think...now both national and regional preschool curriculum guides/syllabuses are available in preschools (WA2) but before the new curriculum was developed preschools were using different curricula depending on their preschools contexts...still many preschools do not implement the integrated play-based curriculum and materials; however, we make follow up and check whether the preschools followed the existing preschool curriculum or not (WA2, WA3).

As observation result showed, different kinds of curricula were used in each preschool. For example, some preschools were using preparing their own curriculum materials whereas others used curricula borrowed from different developed and developing countries. Thus, most of the time lesson contents developed from curriculum materials/textbooks which were purchased from markets and published by the different authors were practiced in most preschools. However, after many discussions had been made WA3 added some points that:

I think somehow it is difficult to say the curriculum that we have is appropriate and practically implemented in the preschools...I do not have clear view or understanding about the curriculum that was carried out in the preschools because ‘preschools’ are not interested to implement the new play-based curriculum.

Preschools have different backgrounds because of types of program and availability of the resources that could impact implementation of the new play-based curriculum. For example, WA1 described that preschools are varied in their resources availability and utilization of curriculum in the implementation process and they have different resources capacity according to the preschool types such as private, religious, community and NGOs. However, Woreda education office make close follow up common curriculum to be implemented as much as possible in all preschools and control its appropriateness, because Woreda is responsible to control quality and to provide experts advices. Accordingly, he continued:

We did not have standardized curriculum in our context which is able to serve all preschools uniformly. As a result, most preschools use their own curriculum; especially the private and religious preschools are using different countries curricula. However, to avoid disparities among preschools curriculum and to bring uniformity in curriculum usage... we have passed similar regulations for all preschools which obliged them [preschools] to follow the new play-based curriculum. ...if it is implemented practically in the preschools it would be appropriate to attain intended preschool education goals or outcome (WA1).

As practically observed and interview responses showed education officials or administrators have awareness problem concerning the curricula that are practiced in the preschools. However, they are forcing 'preschools' to implement the new play-based curriculum without providing important trainings for the teachers that enables them to implement the curriculum. When inspectors were going to the preschools to evaluate overall situation of the preschool education provision and the new play-based curriculum implementation, teachers pretend and act as they were implementing the new play-based curriculum...but practically they had followed academic areas based curricula and teacher-centered traditional teaching-learning approach, because inspectors themselves did not have knowledge about the new integrated curriculum. On the other hand the preschool directors/owners did not want to implement play-based curriculum because parents' need their children to learn more academic areas. Therefore the curricula that implemented in most preschools were not appropriate for the preschool children. Moreover education administrators do not have awareness about the appropriateness of the curricula practiced in preschools.

Preschool administrators and teachers awareness kinds of curricula preschools use

As interview and observation results showed preschool directors/proprietors and teachers did not have awareness about the appropriateness of the new preschool curriculum. As a result, they had met challenges to implement properly in their preschools because both directors and teachers did not get any training concerning the new integrated play-based national/regional curriculum guide before implementation. Besides, teachers traditionally developed separated subjects based curricula were another challenge. Of course, previous national curriculum was competency-based while the new curriculum is play-based (development based). Thus, teachers were influenced by the previously held experiences, and have made resistance to shift their mind to a new

preschool curriculum. In fact, it was difficult to implement without enough knowledge and necessary supportive play materials about the curriculum. As practically observed still teachers are influenced by the traditionally held teaching-learning approaches of academic subject areas. But, entire the contents of the new curriculum material mainly focused on environmental science and somehow complex for the untrained teachers.

Preschools directors/proprietors and teachers were interviewed concerning their awareness about appropriateness of the curriculum that their preschool use. Accordingly, Director (D1) replied that the curricula in use were appropriate...if teaching-learning activities were not effectively taken place, parents would not have sent their children. He also stated, "...to me curriculum appropriateness means providing important education for children with the help of required teaching aids and play materials". He added more ideas that:

"...as such there is no standardized curriculum in the country..." however, we have prepared our own curriculum adapting from different sources. Hence, now we use developed countries curriculum adapting in our context, especially we use curriculum materials that are brought from UK. ...we do not have obtained any national curriculum guide which was prepared and disseminated by the ministry of education (MOE) as you [researcher] said... we have organized curriculum materials/textbooks for aesthetic; science, language and math teaching-learning activities. In our preschool teachers also have daily, weekly and annual lesson plans which help them to provide appropriate education for the children (D1).

Then following the interview responses the researcher asked the director/proprietor the following question. How could the appropriateness of the curricula in use be evaluated? The director/proprietor (D1) also replied that:

We have monthly regular meeting with teachers to discuss and evaluate what curricula activities have been done, what challenges teachers met in their overall activities. Then we exchange different important ideas how they could be effective and what challenges would they have met in the implementation of curriculum activities. If they did not meet any challenge and accomplished their activities properly, we discuss how they can enhance and if they faced any challenges we resolve the problems working collaboratively. By making discussions such ways we are effective and most parents offer appreciation and they are volunteers to work cooperatively with us.

Regarding teachers' awareness about the appropriateness of the curriculum that preschool use, T1 from the same private preschool states that as a private school they work hard to make children capable and competent enough in their [children] current and further education. She said, "...in order to realize our preschool objectives and parents

interest we are working focusing on subject areas like language, literacy, math, and scienceso that we are good at these area...” she also explained that they had available curriculum materials/ textbooks which help them to provide effective teaching-learning activities preparing daily, weekly and annual lesson plans based on textbooks contents which could help them to provide important education. Since our curriculum activities are able to satisfy both parents and their children, “...for me our curricula are appropriate”.

Different preschool directors/owners have different views or awareness levels regarding appropriateness of the curriculum their preschools use and for the new national/regional curriculum. Some preschool directors and teachers considered appropriateness of curriculum like using foreign curriculum as mention by the preschool (A) director and teacher. The preschool director/proprietor (D2) from one of the private preschool had expressed his views that... “Ok! ...for me it is a good question”. He continued that preschools in Dilla town did not have common curriculum so that the curriculum issue was unsolved problem because, there was no standardized and developmentally age appropriate common curriculum. As a result, various kinds of curricula were used in preschools. He said “...I think such variations have created differences among preschools performances...however; we use appropriate curricula providing according to the children’s age levels and program types...”.He also added some points:

Curriculum guide/syllabus prepared by MOE (2009) and later developed by the SNNPREB integrated/play-based curriculum is inappropriate because traditionally teachers and parents have been experienced separated subjects based and teacher-centered instruction approach. For these reasons we developed our own curricula based on our school context adapting different countries curriculum experience to make the curriculum activities more convenient for our children based on parents’ need.

However, as observed by the researcher the preschool curricula were more of academic areas/separate subject focused because the new play-based/child-centered curriculum was not implemented so that teachers were not aware of the appropriateness of the curriculum preschool use, but appropriate curriculum has equally offered emphasis for both academic and developmental activities.

As observed, one of the religious preschools was the only school which had national curriculum guide and preschool education program standard, but not practically

implemented based on the objectives of the curriculum. Director (D3) from this preschool explained that they were used adapting different curriculum to the national curriculum guide in their context. They also used purchased curriculum materials and textbooks which were written in English and Amharic, but they are aware of the new curriculum. Director and teacher from religious preschool (D) had also reported almost similar views and they added some points that they were forced by the 'Woreda education office' the new integrated play-based preschool curriculum to be implemented in their preschools, but they did not have enough knowledge in order to implement the curriculum. Director (D4) continued that appropriateness of the curriculum might be relied on the awareness of the parents and competence of the teachers. However, they did not have competent teachers to use the curriculum adapting in their preschool context. She also described that:

As I have tried to mention before we do not have enough human, financial and material resources in order to implement the new curriculum properly in our preschool. Hence, we have shortage of trained teachers because finding trained teachers for preschool education program was very difficult in Dilla town, even at the zone level...as a result we hired diploma holders but they are not stay for a long time, even sometimes for a semester because of the low payment. Nevertheless it is difficult to implement a new curriculum in our preschool currently because we do not have available resources such as human and materials resources (D4).

In most preschools directors and teacher did not aware of the appropriateness of the curriculum practiced in the preschools. For example, when one of the preschool directors (D5) justified the appropriateness of the curricula practiced in the preschool that:

I hope... the curricula our preschool used are appropriate for the preschool children because we have prepared our own textbooks for each subject matter based on the national curriculum guide and other countries experiences. However, parents complained that the prepared curriculum materials were not age appropriate, colorful and attractive...teachers were also 'worried' to teach based on these materials and to cover the whole chapter/contents at a given period of time.

In contrast, teachers' responses and the researcher's observation results were different from the explanations of the director. Thus, the curricula used in the preschool were not age appropriate and attractive very vast and beyond the children capacities. The textbooks are semester based and have two parts (I and II). For these reasons, the materials made teachers and children too tiresome because teachers rush only to cover the

whole chapter or entire the texts in the 'given months. Teacher (T5) added more ideas that the chapters of the textbooks are broad to maintain curriculum activities according to the ages and interests of the children and to follow hands-on learning approach. She also explained the challenges that she met in the teaching-learning processes:

Based on the prepared materials in the school, children expected to read, write and do class works and homework, especially children in LKG and UKG. Another problem is that the time has allotted to cover the textbooks is not enough ...most of the children are not able to follow attentively the lessons because they are tied by the academic/subject areas learning activities but we use songs to motivate them in the middle of the activities and at the transition time, when we move from one activity to another. However, more emphasis is given to cover the contents of the chapter within a given time, so that teachers give many reading, writing and arithmetic exercises for the children in the classroom and daily based homework. Because the most considerations are given for the subject areas and the teaching-learning approaches are totally teacher-directed because of time constraints.

As the researcher observed the curriculum materials that the preschool practiced were not prepared by the preschool education professional or experienced teachers teaching preschool education. Moreover, age of the children was not taken into account when the materials were prepared. As interview results showed the preschool director did not have preschool education background. As a result, he had awareness problem concerning the curricula used in the preschool. However, teachers had good awareness concerning inappropriateness of the curricula that were practiced in the preschool. Besides, the contents of the curriculum materials/textbooks were too broad and did not age appropriate because the curriculum materials were not prepared based on the national or regional preschool education philosophy and goals. Because of such a type of tied teaching-learning approach many children were disappointed to follow attentively what teachers were saying and doing so that children's enthusiasm for active learning had been affected by the activities that were practiced beyond children capacities. One of the parents informal interview result realized the ideas mentioned saying:

As I observed, the curricula that the preschool (E) practiced were not age appropriate and manageable even for the teacher. I have a child aged 5; his name called 'Gomboro' and attend LKG program in the preschool. Before implementation of the new curricula/textbooks in this preschool, he was very competent and highly interested to do his homework with minimum parents support and was highly motivated to act or do activities what he observed/learned in the school, at similar ways when he came back to home. But after the preschool implemented the new curriculum materials/separated subject based learning

materials were implemented gradually he has lost his previous interest because writing and answering question from textbooks to his exercise books was daily routine works and otherwise punishment was must. Additionally, daily homework was obligatory activities, but he did not have enthusiasm to do his homework even with parents support and reinforcement. Consequently, he refused even going to the school and hates all things even writing a single letter and looking at a picture book. I had tried to discuss smoothly with this teacher...but her response was that, ...this is his problem...nothing I can do; so covering the materials at the given time intervals is my duty...as much as possible help your child at home. Finally this father was forced to change another preschool at the second semester and surprisingly he has shown a great change academically and behaviorally. Majority of the children in this school were disappointed because of inappropriate curricula and burden of both teaching materials and tedious teachers-teaching approaches (informal interview).

On the other hand one of the directors (D6) was also asked her awareness about the appropriateness of curricula that her preschool practiced and the challenges that the preschool had met to implement the new integrated play-based curriculum. Accordingly, director (D6) from NGO preschool explained that our curriculum was age appropriate because we have prepared based on the Montessori hand-on learning method. Montessori learning approach was more influential in the preschool and learning activities were carried out with the help of standardized play materials and equipment. She stated that:

In fact our curriculum was already play-based or child-centered. ...all curriculum activities are provided for children with the help of teaching aids and hand-on learning materials. However, now we are challenged to implement the new curriculum which was developed by the regional education bureau but I understood it is complex and not well organized so that now we are not ready to implementing this curriculum.

On the other hand regarding the appropriateness of the curricula that preschools used, government school directors and teachers reported that the 'O' level or primary school-based preschool program was a new trend in the Dilla town. However, all government primary schools have started preschool program at least in two classrooms in each primary school without adapting curriculum based on national curriculum guide because they are not aware of the new curriculum. In addition, one of the government school directors stated, "... I do not have awareness about preschool curriculum that teachers used because we do not have specific curriculum guide for preschool children ..." (D7). She also justified her views regarding the appropriateness of the new preschool curriculum that:

I remember...Woreda has disseminated a curriculum guide and materials prepared by the region education bureau 'experts' but teachers were not volunteering to use. I have tried to find the problem why they refused to implement. They replied that the curriculum materials were beyond their capacity because teachers traditionally experienced separated subjects focused curriculum (not play-based). So we have informed the problems what teachers forwarded to the Woreda education office administrators but they did not respond to it. So we have returned the curriculum guide and materials back the Woreda education office (D7, T7).

In addition, director and teacher (D8, T8) from another government primary school (H) informed the same ideas and explained additional points that the preschool did not have any adapted or developed preschool curriculum materials; however, teaching-learning activities carried out according to the teachers' lesson plans because teachers have responsibility to prepare lesson plan and taking place learning activities based on their experiences. Director (D8) also explained that:

Although we have curriculum guide and materials offered by the Woreda education office, teachers are not able to manage and refused to implement...I think it is very complex for teachers and children. So it needs some revision and teachers to be trained before implementation. ...Just teachers claimed that it is beyond children's capacity. Of course it is difficult for untrained teachers for preschool education and our school children are being with different age groups... Government schools did not have any specific curriculum because directors and

teachers are not aware of curriculum that was prepared and disseminated by the regional education bureau for each zone and Woreda but they use grade one textbooks, especially for the basic literacy and numeracy skills development. However, children spent half a date in different outdoor activities in addition to academic areas. Teachers organized children for different activities during circle time such as traditional play games and storytelling. As observed children daily had free play time in the play field. During free playtimes they were playing being in pair and group in the play field as they like. Storytelling, play games, discussion and asking and answering activities were undertaken with the help of teachers. Even though the schools do not have appropriate curriculum, daily, children expected to learn math (alphabet numbers & simple operations), English and Amharic reading and writing even if they did not have specific curriculum guide.

4.2.5. Participants knowledge sources of the curricula in use

According to the Bredekamp et al., (1992) curriculum is an organized framework that describes the content children are to learn, the processes through which children

achieve the identified curricular goals, what teachers help children achieve these goals, and the context in which teaching and learning occur. However, zone education department and Woreda education office administrators have low knowledge about curricula used in preschools.

The interviews with zone education department and Woreda education office showed that they were not aware of a specific kind of curriculum or sources of curricula preschools used in Dilla administrative town. However, since they are responsible persons to ensure appropriateness of the curriculum used in the zone and Woreda levels, they have expected to have understanding of the curricula that were used in preschools. As zone education officials explained different kinds of curricula were implemented in different preschools, especially private and religious preschools use curriculum from various sources but a few preschools deliver education for children by adapting other countries curriculum materials based on the national and regional preschool curriculum guide. This means that there were various kinds of curricula used in each preschool from various sources.

As interview and observation results showed in most preschool education programs, purchased curriculum materials from markets were utilized, especially academic area learning materials such as math, language and literacy but in many preschools these materials implemented without identifying or assessing whether they were age appropriate or not because they have low knowledge about curriculum. As observed some of the materials borrowed from different sources were comprehensive and comprised information about all aspects of children's skills development. In contrast other curricula resources were specific and focus on a specific academic area such as language and literacy or math. Furthermore, Woreda education office experts explained that in Dilla town, preschools have lack of competence to adapt or modify curriculum in their preschool context. As the result, they were trying to implement the borrowed curriculum as it was and most preschools were following 'English language focused preschool curricula', without English language proficiency teaching-learning activities were provided based on the purchased textbooks contents. However, town administrative education office (Woreda) have tried common curriculum to be uniformly implemented in all types of preschool programs and Amharic to be instructional language to minimize

knowledge gap among preschools (WA1, WA2, WA3). Nevertheless, indigenous people still raise the issue of using local language (Gedeo language) in preschool program.

The researcher asked education administrators/officials one exceptional question “what should be an appropriate curriculum of preschool education” Woreda education administrators (WA1, WA2) replied that an appropriate curriculum should give more attention for the children’s holistic development: physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, etc. Woreda education expert (WA1) explained that preschool curriculum activities or education should be play-based and age appropriate so “that is why we forced preschools to implement the new integrated play-based curriculum according to their preschools context...” so as to address children’s learning and development.

The researcher also forwarded similar questions for the teacher and director interview participants concerning knowledge that they have about the sources of curriculum use in the preschools. As their interview responses and the researcher observation result showed preschools used curriculum from various sources in Dilla town. For example, some of the preschools used UK and US curricula others had used Indian, Kenya curricula and some preschools also used preparing their own curricula adapting from different sources, especially private preschool (A) and community school. For example private preschool “A” used curriculum and play materials from UK. Accordingly, teachers from the same preschool (A) stated that:

We have different teaching and play materials which are applied according to the types of programs such as LKG, UKG and primary level programs but I do not know the sources of the curricula that are implemented in our preschool.

However, I usually carry out my teaching-learning program preparing my weekly and annual lesson plans based on the contents of the textbooks, particularly for language, math and science lessons.

In the case of government preschools, both directors and the teachers did not have awareness concerning preschool curriculum as it has been discussed earlier and they were not volunteer to implement the new regional preschool education curriculum. Besides, directors did not have knowledge regarding the sources of curricula that had been used for the primary-based preschools or “O’ level program by the teachers. Director from one of the government primary-based preschool (D7) states:

...teachers are the main sources of curricula because they are expected to promote numeracy and literacy skills ...children are also expected to develop social skills and school behavior ...I think to develop these skills special curriculum is not

expected... any way, teachers have responsibility to provide important education. Teacher (T7) also described...I sometimes use grade one curriculum materials/textbooks, especially English and math textbooks including my teaching experiences without any curriculum guide.

On the other hand director (D8) from government preschool (H), explained that “whatever the teaching materials were used, our expectation was mainly children to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills that could prepare them [children] for primary school.

Moreover, in the other research preschool settings the sources of curricula were different and they used curriculum materials/textbooks as the source of curricula, for example purchased textbooks contents were used based on the prepared weekly and annual lesson plans. Others also used previous national curriculum integrating with developed countries curriculum materials such as UK, India, Kenya preschool curricula. However, most teachers did not have enough knowledge about the resources of curricula used in the preschools. However, as observed the curriculum materials that are existing in each preschool were not from the same sources. Hence, each preschool use curricula from different sources because of the availability of different curriculum material resources in the market. As a result, curricula from different sources were practiced in preschool of Dilla town such as borrowed from other town [Addis Ababa], contents of purchased textbooks from market, grade one curriculum materials and from unspecific sources. On the other hand some preschools used curriculum materials from other better equipped and resourceful preschools. However, most interview participant preschool directors and teachers do not have knowledge about the sources of preschool curricula that were used in the preschools.

4.2.6. Linkage of the curricula preschools use to the national curriculum guide

As the findings of the study revealed different curricula were practiced in the research preschools from various sources. Accordingly, the researcher asked education officials, directors and teachers to explore either there were aware or not regarding linkage of the curriculum preschool used with the national curriculum. One of the zone education department experts states that “... our curriculum is not respected alone to be established/run out of the national goal of the preschool education”. Since it is part of the national early childhood education goals, our curricula have linkage to the national curriculum. He also explained that the national curriculum/syllabus had been followed so as to achieve intended national education goals, and ‘preschools’ also expected to

implement based on the national curriculum guide/syllabus. The national and regional curriculum framework has almost similar objectives and preschools use adapting in their own preschools context even if they used curriculum from different sources. However, preschools have faced challenges in implementing the new integrated play-based curriculum because of lack of trained teachers and awareness problems (Z1&Z2). Similarly, the Dilla town administrative education administrators/Woreda education office administrators stated:

Since our preschool curriculum guide is developed in the regional education bureau based on the national curriculum guide, we are working to achieve the national and regional ECE goals. So the curriculum we use has linkage to the national and regional curriculum. However, there are challenges in the implementation stage because preschools are not willing to implement the new play-based curriculum because of their traditionally held previous academic areas based teaching-learning experiences (WA1, WA, WA3).

Findings of observation and interview of this study showed; however, some education officials/experts have awareness problem and lack of due attention concerning the new integrated play-based preschool curriculum and they were not working collaboratively with the preschools. As a result, there was “hidden” conflict between ‘preschools’ and Woreda education administrators, because preschools were forced to use Amharic as an instructional language. Moreover, preschool directors and teachers were asked similar question concerning linkage between curriculums the preschools use with the national curriculum. Accordingly, one of the preschool directors from private preschool (D1) replied that since there is no standardized national curriculum in the ‘country’ how could be possible to compare our curriculum to the national preschool curriculum. In addition, one of the same preschool teachers (T1) forwarded:

I do not think so whether our curriculum has linkage with the national curriculum or not because our preschool do not have written national curriculum guide...but I know that our curriculum materials and activities have linkage to the other preschools in the town.

As the observation result showed the preschool did not have national or regional written curriculum. However, after the data gathering activities was completed the researcher had offered soft copy of national curriculum for the ‘preschool ‘because teachers and director was not aware of the national curriculum guide/syllabus. As interview and observation results showed the religious preschool(C) has the national

curriculum in their preschool and the copy of the national curriculum guide was available in the library.

On the contrary in the government preschools there was no specifically organized curriculum that was provided based on the national or regional curriculum objectives. Accordingly, directors and teachers were explained similar ideas as they did not have clear ideas concerning preschool education curriculum (D7, D8, T7). For example, teacher (T8) explained that:

... I do not think so whether my lessons have linkage to the national/regional curriculum or not...that is not 'my concern'...my concern is preparing children for primary education. "...those children who are enrolled in our school are from poor families and they need at least basic literacy and numeracy skills before they are going to the primary school.

Furthermore, other teacher explained that implementing the new national/regional play-based curriculum in government primary-based preschools or "O" level program is difficult because there were no necessary resources. So, talking about the linkage of the curriculum we use with the national/regional curriculum was unthinkable without available resources and trained teachers. Teacher (T7) suggested different ideas concerning preschool curriculum guide:

Even preparing common curriculum guide for government preschools and other preschools program is unfair because preschool programs are carried out by the private owners, religious organizations and NGOs relatively with the trained teachers, supportive learning materials with better facilities. While things that observed in the government preschools were chalk and chalkboard only. So how is it possible to implement integrated preschool curriculum in government primary school-based preschools? So, there is also confusion to implement play-based curriculum in our context... without available supportive learning materials and trained teachers.

In contrast director (D2) and director (D4) explained that our preschool curriculum had linkage to the national curriculum goals. They also explained that, they made a great effort when they were developed their own curriculum to have linkage to the national curriculum/contents and objectives. Hence, they believed that the preschool curricula have linkage to the national preschool curriculum. However, the observation and document analysis results showed that teaching-learning process was focused on the academic areas. Thus, more emphasis was given for literacy, numeracy and arithmetic, but the prepared curriculum materials did not have linkage with the national/regional

play-based preschool curriculum. In general the curricula that are used in most preschools do not have linkage to the national/regional preschool curriculum.

4.2.7. Resistance to implement the new play-based curriculum

As explained earlier there was no common and standardized curriculum in the preschools. Even though there is available integrated play-based curriculum and materials, “preschools” were not interested to implement because they do not have awareness concerning this curriculum.

As zone education department and Woreda education office administrators’ interview results showed they were not aware of the new national and regional preschool curriculum and preschool education program standard. Besides, Amharic is being instructional media, teachers previous experiences of academic area focused teaching-learning approaches and lack of teachers’ competence were the major causes the directors/owners and teachers to resist implementing the new curriculum. In addition, teachers and directors have justified the reasons why they resist implementing the new curriculum that, all of the preschools directors and most teachers do not have training in preschool education. As mentioned earlier, training or workshops were not offered for the teachers and directors/proprietors concerning the new curriculum beforehand. One of the directors explained the major challenges to implement the new play-based curriculum as follows:

Although teachers have training gap in preschool education, the most influential challenges to implement the new preschool curriculum are teachers’ adapted traditional teaching-learning practices (teacher-centered) and teachers’ previous experiences of separated subject areas teaching approaches. Lack of awareness about the new curriculum is another challenge because concerned education department or office did not offer training for the preschool teachers and administrators.

Moreover, one of the regional education bureau experts (RA) was asked the reasons why trainings/workshops were not given for the preschool administrators and teachers’ before implementation of the new curriculum. Accordingly he said:

When the curriculum was developed education experts from each zone were invited and from each zone two experts were participated. We also made consensus with the experts the curriculum to be adapted and implemented in all preschools ...rooms were also left the curriculum to be modified depending on each zone/Woreda situation and cultural context because a zone education department have mandate even to translate and implement curriculum into local

language. Providing training for the preschool teachers and administrators is the responsibility of the zone education department and Woreda education office.

However, as interview result showed zone education department or Woreda education office did not provide any training or workshop for the directors and teachers in order to create awareness and develop skills and knowledge regarding the new play-based curriculum. On the other hand one of the interview participants from zone education department (ZA2) explained that the local community has raised questions that preschool education to be provided in the local language. Accordingly, the zone education department had tried to translate Amharic to local language (Gedeo language) but eventually the ‘zone’ did not make the activities successful because of lack of resources and due attention. ZA2 forwarded other challenges that the Zone education department faced to translate the curriculum into the local language:

One of the education experts was assigned the new preschool curriculum was translated into local language [Gedeo’s language] but before the activity was completed he was departed [died]. After his death no body tried to continue ...because of lack of local language experts, lack of financial resources and lack of zone education department administrators due attention.

As observed there was no capable and trained committee members who could continue the started translation activities. On the other hand all of the zone and Woreda education administrators/experts did not have preschool education background.

4.2.8. Instructional approaches/strategies in classroom

In order to answer the question ‘how preschool curricula do implemented/practiced in the preschools’, the researcher gathered available information through observation when curriculum activities were practiced in the classroom and out of classroom. So as to increase insight, after observation has carried out, post interviews were also conducted on teachers. The researcher spent equal amounts of time in the classroom during the morning and afternoon scheduled times in each classroom of the research preschools to explore how activities were practiced in the classroom and out of the classroom based on the each preschool curriculum contents and teachers’ lesson plan.

This study found that nearly in all preschools, mainly *teacher-centered* teaching-learning approaches were employed, especially during academic learning areas. Thus, low attention was given for play-based learning and developmental activities. However, the Ethiopia ECE policy and strategies(MOE, 2010, p.14) stated that preschool education could employ “child-centered approach and play will be used as the main means of

enhancing the child's learning experiences" that helps to promote the children's holistic learning and development including culturally relevant, developmentally appropriate inclusive indoor and outdoor materials.

Although teachers followed various instructional approaches/methods relying on their preschools objectives, availabilities of the resources and convenience of schools learning environment, nearly all participant preschools followed teacher-centered instructional approaches. Based on such an instructional approach the researcher raised questions for the teachers the reasons why often preschools were used teacher-centered instructional approach. Accordingly, most teachers replied that traditionally teachers adapted teaching-learning trends, large class size and lack of play materials were replied as the major causes for the teacher-centered teaching-learning practice, and teachers also considered this approach as an effective means of instructional strategy for the academic areas teaching-learning activities. Nevertheless, in some preschools both teacher-directed and play-based/child-initiated approaches were implemented in the classrooms. For example, both 'play-based' and teacher-centered teaching-learning approaches were employed in NGO preschool classrooms and out of classroom using age appropriate play materials. In addition, one of the teachers from NGO preschool explained that:

When academic areas focused teaching-learning activities carried out, we [teachers] employed teacher-centered instructional approach supporting by the hand-on learning materials/teaching aids. While child-centered or child-initiated learning activities carried out in the classroom children play using different play materials according to their interests with minimum teacher guide. During child-initiated learning activities they learn different games and important basic computer skills. Hence, the computer program usually carried out on Friday afternoon, at the last day of the week (T6).

Director from the same preschool also shared the ideas that explained by the teacher and expressed her views that:

Teachers implement appropriately hand-on-learning approaches to promote children holistic learning and development. For example, we have age appropriate available play materials in all classrooms corners so that both play-based and teacher-centered teaching-learning approaches are implemented, especially for LKG and UKG (D6).

The instructional approaches in private and religious preschools were somehow different from NGO preschool approaches because in private and religious preschools there were no available play materials in the classroom. As a result, more emphasis were given for the academic teacher-centered instructional approaches supporting 'with play

games and teaching aids'. Thus, mostly curriculum activities were practiced integrating teacher-centered instructional approaches '*with play*' such as using plays games, singing and role plays. After the classroom observation was carried out post informal interviews were conducted on one of the private preschool teachers concerning the instructional approaches and explained as follows:

I always teach children integrating different curriculum activities... for me teaching integrating curriculum activities mean teaching one subject area lesson activities connecting to the others. For instance, when I teach 'word' formation...I first write a word on the chalkboard and read twice or three times at a time such as a word like '*horse*' ...then I let children (the whole group) read repeatedly more than twice following me... I also facilitate at the same time children develop reading skills, vocabulary and math skills. For example I ask children as how many letters could form a word "horse" to develop children's math skills along with vocabulary meanings (a teacher informal interview).

As observed by the researcher she first wrote a word for example '*horse*' on the chalkboard and let the whole class read after her repeating: horse...horse...horse...when she pointed with stick/cane the whole class was read repeating loudly along her and, then she asked them how many letters were formed the word "horse"...the whole class answered loudly...five...five... then she had let children to write on their exercise books. Finally she collected all exercise books to evaluate. However, children were not encouraged to ask questions because the whole activities were teacher-centered (question and answering approach is teacher-centered).

Finding of the observation result showed, one of the community preschool teachers followed almost the same instructional approaches when Amharic and English alphabet letters were taught. When she was teaching alphabet letters or numbers, flash cards were used as a teaching aid. For example, English alphabet letters from 'Aa to Zz' were written on the chalkboard as usual and then, after she had given orientation she let children to sing usual songs (e.g. ABCD..EFG...HIJK...LMNOP....) and they sang three times when she wrote "A" sound words such as 'B' bag, 'C' cat, 'H' hat on the chalkboard...she read once and let children read repeating along with her twice or three times and then, she told them to copy on their exercise books. When most children had finished writing ...she told them to stop... clapping her hands and ask volunteer children read again coming near to the chalkboard and the children read appropriately along with

other children. She sang the same song being together with the class before she proceeded to the next lesson.

Furthermore, the *whole group activities* were well known and common strategy in teacher-centered and lecture method of instructional approaches. As observed in the private preschool 'B', teachers also used similar instructional approaches. For example, a teacher with a long year experiences explained that teacher-centered teaching approach was best method in a classroom with a large class size. She also stated that, "the whole group activities are common and preferable strategy in my teaching approaches because I brought desirable change on children performances using the whole group activities in the classroom with large class size. She also explained that since implementing small group activities is difficult for the large class size, of course the 'whole or large group' teaching-learning approach is effective, especially for the literacy and numeracy skills development. This kind of instructional approach was also supported by the another informal interview participant teacher from private preschool 'A', and she stated that, teacher-centered teaching-learning approach could motivate children to engage in the subject areas learning, especially math, reading and writing so that teacher-directed the whole group activities were effective strategy, particularly to promote children's basic reading skills. During post observation, the researcher has carried out interview with this teacher concerning her instructional approaches, and why the whole/large group activities employed and what benefits children obtained from the teaching approaches. She explained as follows:

...as you [researcher] observed when I teach alphabet letters before 'words formation' from letters. ...first I show the letter chart on the wall for the class before I am going to write on the chalkboard and let them [children] read letters aloud twice with me...then I write on the chalkboard and read twice and I let children read aloud along with me and the activities would be continued until children would understand... following these activities I write two or three similar words using the letters of the week(e.g. A) on the chalkboard such as 'ant, apple'...for example 'A' stands for 'ant', 'A' stands for 'apple' and finally I let them [children] copy the words from the chalkboard on their exercise books and I also check how they are writing and help them moving round the desks so that using repetition instructional method, children can develop different skills like speaking, reading and sounds formation at the same time.

Although the teacher teaching approaches were participatory and help children to understand 'sound' formation of the words reading repeatedly along with the teacher;

however, she was not let children to form similar words using ‘A’ sound. In such a teaching approach children usually followed the activities under the control of teachers, in turns it might affect children self-regulation and self-confidence even though children motivated to follow the activities what were performed by the teacher.

As it has been explained before, entire the teaching-learning activities of the preschools were *teacher-centered* instructional approach even though the regional curriculum guide has stressed preschools to implement play-based/child-centered learning approaches. Teachers also reasoned out why they did not implement the play-based preschool curriculum. As mentioned earlier, teachers claim unavailability of play materials, large class size and parents and teachers’ traditionally accepted academic focused teaching-learning approaches as the major causes. As a result, small group activities did not have implemented in most preschools, instead the whole group activities were used. Hence, teachers considered teacher-centered instructional approaches and the whole group activities as the better strategies so as to promote children skills and knowledge for the academic areas. In addition, one of the informal interview participant teachers from the private preschool ‘B’ stated:

I belief that teacher-centered instructional strategy is effective method to make children more competent in reading, writing and arithmetic when I teach academic subject area...I use various important teaching aids and role play activities to motivate children and to follow actively the activities that are carried out in the classroom. For instance, at the interval of all lesson activities I let children sing the lesson related songs because children like singing songs, so I use different songs as a means of motivation and teaching strategy during academic areas teaching-learning activities.

Almost all research preschools in the town had shared similar teaching experiences and instructional approaches. As observed by the researcher some preschools used common curriculum materials/textbooks with common curriculum contents but they have differences because of availability/unavailability of resources (human, materials and financial resources), usage of teaching aids and teachers’ competences.

On the other hand religious preschools followed more of *lecture* method of instruction strategy because of lack of trained teachers and unavailability of indoor play materials. But teachers use different local teaching aids when academic areas activities were performed such as ‘corks’. From this preschool, teachers and the director stated that even if they did not have enough trained teachers and available materials they worked

effectively in order to make children more competent, especially in reading, writing and arithmetic through teacher-centered teaching-learning approaches. As classroom observations result confirmed, the fact that the children have adapted sitting to long time in the classroom following teacher-centered teaching-learning approaches in both religious and private preschools because in each interval of activities and transition times (from one lesson to another) teachers let children to sing different songs. In relating to instructional approaches one of the informal interview participant teachers explained that:

...in addition to the lecture method, I use participatory teaching-learning methods through asking and answering .., For example, during science lesson I get children to engage actively in asking-and answering questions. Actually science activities mainly are carried out orally in the classroom through asking and answering, and showing models and singing related songs.

These types of teaching-learning approaches are also common in most preschools.

For example the government primary school-based preschools ('O' levels) 'G'and 'H' asking and answering instructional strategies were the common instructional approaches focusing on the basic literacy and numeracy skills development. One of the informal interview participant teachers from government school explained that:

...I use lecture method because of large class size (70) in a classroom...the school do not have any prepared or purchased materials (teaching aids) to support children's learning activities, however, I teach basic literacy and numeracy skills through lecture method. For example, alphabet letters and numbers, words construction, and arithmetic (simple operation e.g. addition and subtraction) are practiced using my experiences....children sing various songs in the transition times from one lesson to another such as alphabet letter songs. I also use large group learning approach writing words or numbers on the chalkboard.

As observed by the researcher, before instructions were carried out in the classroom, she provided orientation for the whole class and she usually wrote three words on the chalkboard as other teachers do... and she said, 'A' stand for *apple*, 'B' stand for *box*, and 'C' stands for *cat*. Then she told children repeat after her the words that were written on the chalkboard, and then she read twice along with children. She let two children calling their name to read the words coming near the chalkboard...as she usually do, the two children read loudly for the whole class turn by turn pointing with the long stick and then the whole class were repeating after them [children]...when after they finished, she told the class clap for the children...all clap. Finally she told the whole class copy from chalkboard on their exercise books and she sat on the chair in front of the class. This instructional approach was common also for the whole group activities. For

example, as she did for the language lesson she used the same instructional approach for the math lesson...at first she wrote title on the chalkboard "Addition" in a noisy classroom saying...don't make noise...be...silent...then showing stick/cane and slashing on desk to put fear in them[children] and wrote ,for example ,numbers 1 to 10 [1, 2, 3...10] alphabet numbers and she read once as usual and she called the names of two children to read the written numbers on the chalkboard. Then these two children read turn by turn aloud along with the whole class. After they have finished the activity she said, clap...for these children...all clapped to motivate the children. Then the following operations were written on the chalkboard...she let the whole class read after her; she continued reading the following operations:

1) $1+3=$ _____ 2) $1+4=$ _____ 3) $1+6=$ _____ 4) $4+5=$ _____

She also read these mathematical operations once and, then let the whole class copied on their exercise books and told them do as class work. Then she sat down on the chair to evaluate, at a time the elder children were controlling classroom discipline holding sticks/canes in their hands...then a few children brought their exercise books for evaluation to the teacher but most children did not do the exercise. Finally she collected children's exercise books to evaluation other days. However, some children did not have their own exercise books. Then she asked the children/class to answer the questions on the chalkboard and then, as usual two children answered appropriately writing on the chalkboard. The same instructional strategies were also observed in the government primary school-based preschool 'H'. Hence, the same lecture method/teaching approach was used because the numbers of children in a classroom were too large. After the classroom observation over, the researcher asked the same question for the teacher why she was following the same instructional methods. She explained as follows:

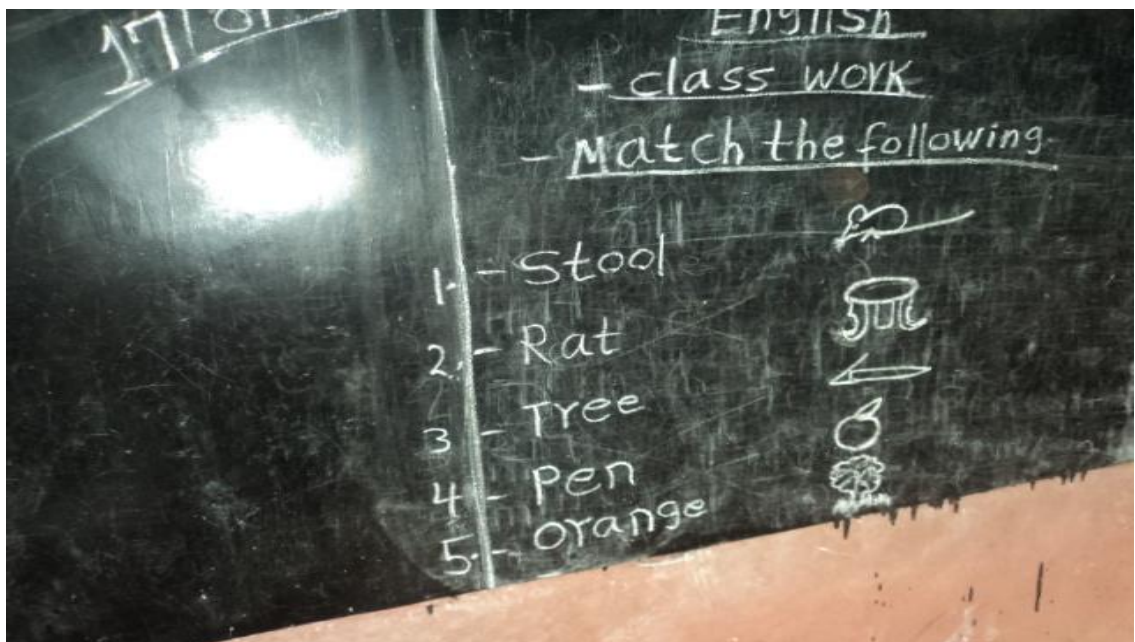
Commonly we follow the lecture method and the whole group participatory activities as you [the researcher observed] we have large class size...and we do not have other options to manage children in such a crowded classroom but we facilitate outdoor play activities that help them to learn playing with their peers in group or pair in the school natural environment/play field.

Generally, teacher-centered teaching strategy is the most influential approach nearly in all the preschools (e.g. private, religious, and government and community preschools). In these usually the whole group activities were carried out in the classroom because of large class size.

Matching words

Furthermore, matching words with picture was also one of the common ways of the teaching-learning strategies in all preschools to promote children's vocabulary and communication skills. Children were also very interested to follow from such an approach. This kind of teaching-learning strategy was not only used to practice writing word son the chalkboards but also helped to practice using words chart on the wall. For example, one of the teachers from religious preschools used matching strategy to teach meaning of the words. At first she orally asked children to answer the meaning of the words in Amharic and then, after children answered stretching their hands. She also wrote the words on the chalkboard and let children to copy on their exercise books and let them to do as the class work as observed below picture (1), but copying pictures was challenging issue for children on their exercise books. Of course, children's drawing abilities were not taken into consideration by the teacher; however, she helped children moving around desks.

Moreover, all preschools' teachers used such a teaching strategy in order to match numbers with symbols, words with pictures and words with numbers (see picture 1).



Note: picture (1) from classroom by the researcher

Moreover, teachers also used the same strategies for the alphabet letters learning and demonstrating how children are able to write letters, and similarly teachers wrote

alphabet letters on the chalkboard children to learn alphabet letters and matching upper- and lower case letters.

Role-play was another instructional method that had been implemented in many preschools through teacher-centered teaching approach and with the children active involvements. Besides, role-play teaching-learning strategies were employed in the basic literacy and math learning activities. Hence, role play was believed as one of the best methods in order to teach basic numeracy and literacy skills using mathematical ‘word problems’ and then, children actively involved through role play activities in the classroom. For example, when a teacher was teaching mathematical ‘word problems’, she first let children orally count numbers from 20 to 30, after they have counted turn by turn, she wrote ‘a word problem on the chalkboard saying:

I am a number. I found between 24 and 26. What number am I? then she asked three children to come and stand side by side in front of the class...then, told the child on the right side to say “I am twenty three, the child on the left side also said “I am twenty six”, the child in the middle asked the whole class “who am I?” ...the whole class said...twenty five...twenty five...repeating, then teacher continued practicing in such ways. She finally said “...children practice similar activities from the text books with your friends.

It was effective instructional approach because children actively participated and became highly motivated.

Comparison in the teacher-centered/directed instructional approach was used to teach some new words in all preschool programs. For example, one of the teachers from NGO preschool used writing three new words: taller, shorter, the same height and she choice two children to stand up side by side. Then she said, “...now we are going to compare [calling names]. Who is taller? There were obvious differences in the height of the two children...then most children replied and give the correct answer. She then asked. “Who is shorter?” again most of the children replied and give the correct answer. She continued..., “Now can you give me an example of someone who has the same height to this friend in the classroom?” [calling one of the children name] taller than you in the classroom?” The boy said “my friend” she asked the boy to come [friend of the earlier boy] she told children answer stretching their hands... she gave chance to answer for a child who was stretched first his hand [calling name]. He said ‘both’...both have the same height ...all right ... “teacher said”...and she let children to sing song along with her; all sang song before break time. Her asking and answering method made children to

be more active participants and made the activities more enjoyable even if the activities were teacher initiated/teaching-centered approaches. In addition, she believes that asking and answering activities would make children to be enjoyable and be more active in the teaching-learning activities. The teacher also made children to be enthusiastic for mathematical ideas and to understand connecting the activities to the communication and literacy (reading and writing) through asking and answering teaching-learning strategies. However, most children did not involve in asking and answering questions because of large class size.

As observed in all preschools, science lesson was carried out orally in the classroom through asking and answering method and singing related songs. For example, one of the teachers from religious preschools used asking and answering strategy for the science lesson. When she usually started to teach science lesson, first she asks children what they had learnt previous time/day before beginning the new 'title'. Children answered stretching their hands turn by turn and then, she wrote the new lesson title on the chalkboard for instance, "personal hygiene" and after orientations was given for the activities. She gets the children to sing song...they sang 'personal hygiene' song performing in action. Then she gave explanation about the importance of the personal hygiene and how personal hygiene related to the personal health. She asked children how their families keep their personal hygiene and she told children how they should have keep personal hygiene and how hygiene related to one's health. She explained how they could wash their hands after and before meal, and she also explained clean and dirty things in a way how children could understand then she asked children how they keep their personal hygiene and children answered stretching up their hands and she gave chances to the class answer turn by turn and they answered accordingly. Finally she revised the activities and let them to sing again the same song.

As observed in the private and religious preschools, in the science lesson asking and answering methods was employed. For example, one of the teachers from private preschool used the similar oral instructional approaches through asking and answering as other teachers do. She started orienting children not to make noise and she asked the whole class. She said "...what we had learned yesterday"? ...who can remember/answer...?" All children stretched their hands said me... me...me ...Miss..., she

gave chance for a girl calling her name and she [a girl] said “science...” teacher said also what...? All said ‘sense organs’...yes ... right. Then she wrote on the chalkboard names of the five sense organs and first she read once and let the whole class read after her loudly and the whole class repeated after her three times. Then she said “...alright children now who can come and tell us touching his/her sense, organs coming in front of the class?” children stretching their hands said...me...me...Miss...Miss...Calling “Miss” is common in all preschools to communicate with teachers/caregivers. Most children had stretched up their hands but she gave chance for two children and they came and properly answered teaching their body parts. Finally she said that the whole class clap for the children...all clapped. Then she let the whole class sang song along her touching/pointing her sense organs. These kinds of teaching approaches (oral) were also common in all preschools in science lessons. However, teachers do not initiate children to be engaged in creative activities.

Moreover, in the private, religious, community and NGO preschools finger play activities are implanted during simple mathematical operation teaching-learning activities. Hence, simple mathematical operations are also supported by the finger counting method. For example, math operation $2+1=$ __, $1+2=$ __, $3-1=$ __. Children add and subtract the given mathematical simple operations by counting their fingers so that they could add and subtract even if the instructional approach was teacher-centered. Moreover, in most preschools teachers include singing in the daily teaching-learning activities and storytelling in the circle time activities. Of course, these kinds of teaching-learning approach considered as better instructional strategies and enjoyable for both the teachers and children.

Furthermore, the *whole group* teaching learning-instructional approaches are implemented in the research preschools for the geometry concept development of the children. As observed by the researcher during geometry concept development practices in the classrooms, teachers use integrating different curriculum activities so as to develop children’s communication and literacy skills, fine motor development (shading the figures) and promoting mathematical concepts. For example, a teacher from NGO preschool with a long years teaching experiences in preschool helped children to develop geometry concepts using figures or shapes (line, triangle, rectangles etc.). As the same

time it helps children to develop communication and motor skills through geometry concepts development approaches. She also clarified how children developed geometry concept and its additional use as follows:

I use figures and models when I teach the typical geometrical shapes and let children to repeat what I said in order to develop new concepts in the children mind. So I teach the concept of geometry showing models and drawing on the chalkboard and paper, and then how geometry figures formed and named according to their shapes and they practiced for weeks until they would understand the names and shapes appropriately. Finally I let them [children] to shade using pencils according to the shapes on the drawing paper so as to develop fine motors of the children's. Drawing geometry figures can also supported by the computer software...I let also children practice drawing simple geometry symbols on the chalkboard turn by turn in the classroom(T6).

As observed she had knowledge of geometry portion and she used the language of the geometry consistently and effectively integrating to the language and literacy skills as well as for the fine motor skills development trough drawing and shading/coloring the geometry figures. As a result, the children in (T6) classroom had developed knowledge to match names of the geometry according to the shaped and discussed specific characteristic of the shapes in the classroom.

As observation results showed in most preschools the whole group activities were used based on the *asking and answering* when teachers teaching drawing simple geometry figures/shapes on the chalkboard. For example, a teacher from one of the private preschool drawing rectangle on the chalkboard and asked the whole class that "What is the 4 side shaped figure on the chalkboard?" the whole class replied "rectangle..." 'Yes', said teacher and explained that opposite sides are parallel...showing parallel lines from the chart on the wall and she said also these are "parallel lines." do they ever meet each other? Children replied Yes..."No"...Teacher answered that "they never ever meet up or cross one another". she continued...how many sides the rectangle has?" the teacher and students together count loudly and all said 'four'. She also applied similar strategies children to practice about triangle and trapezium. She asked children pointing trapezium figure with long cane on the chalkboard, and let children practice in the same way like rectangle. Finally she let children sang song before proceeding to the next lesson. Even if the teaching-learning activities were participatory, the teacher does not employ small group activities or child-initiated learning approaches because of large class size.

Singing is common approach in all preschools and used as “spice”. Preschools used songs integrating to the teacher-directed instructional approaches during academic areas teaching-learning activities. It is common in all types of preschool programs and children also highly motivated for singing songs. As observed in the private, religious and community preschools teachers usually let children to sing songs at the beginning of the lesson, during the transition time and at the end of lesson/instructional activities through teacher-directed approaches in the classroom.

Circle time activities: As interview and observation results showed in most preschools circle time activities were carried out outside the classroom, in the play field/under trees shade. Teachers use circle time to development social skills, school rules and self-awareness skills of the children. Besides, children engaged in oral language development through discussions and storytelling. They learn listening when another person talk and how they value school rules. In addition, storytelling, music and movement are undertaken outside of the classroom in the play field. Teachers and directors explained that circle time has played a crucial roles in the preschool curricula implementation because during circle times children come together to share various experiences and they develop their communication skills during oral language, reading, storytelling and play games. Besides, orientation from teachers had helped children to develop group play, listening and turn-taking during play activities. Circle time activities that incorporate music and movement usually can hold children’s attention for the longer periods of time than listening and sitting in the classroom for a long time. Thus, because of the large class size circle time program were not carried out in the classroom or any separated building rather it was carried out outside the classroom in the play field or under trees shade in the preschools.

4.3. Supportive Learning Environment

In this part the findings have addressed the responses to two research questions (4&5): What environment is required for children learning and development? How preschool physical environment and facilities are conducive to support their learning and development? Under these two research questions in response to common themes were analyzed. These common themes are: 1) *outdoor supportive learning environment*; 2) *outdoor play materials and resources*; 3) *outside classroom facilities*; 4) *toilet facilities*;

5) *classroom physical and social environment*; 6) *large class size*; 7) *seating arrangement*

As observation result revealed, indoor and outdoor physical learning environment of the preschools were somehow have different appearances depending on the types of preschool programs. Nearly in all types of programs indoor activities were teacher-centered, while outdoor activities were somehow child-centered/child-initiated. For example, in majority of the preschools there were no convenient space and play materials in the classroom. For these reasons, teachers usually obliged to take risk when children play freely using available local and purchased outdoor play materials. But the play materials were not sufficient when compared to the existing numbers of the children in the preschools. As a result, children obliged to wait for long times, especially to use outdoor play materials because play materials are few in numbers. Moreover, the existing play materials are also low in quality and quantity. Thus, many preschools did not have enough safety and well maintained outdoor play materials. However, teachers usually made close follow up when children play freely in the playground/field to overcome challenges. As McCracken as cited in Jackman (2001) advised, "Outdoor time requires adults who playful, have sharp senses and quick reactions, and who will make close observations on children" (p. 36-38). These shows that outdoor play activities are how sensitive and require a significant teachers' responsibility, enthusiasm, and scaffolding children in order to develop self-confidence, self-regulation and social interaction. However, in most preschools the existing outdoor physical environment, play materials and equipment, outside classroom facilities and classroom physical environment and facilities were not equally serving in order to fulfill the children's individual interest and needs in accordance with the national preschool physical and facilities standard.

Although preschools have understanding about the importance of the physical environment for the children learning and development, there were no rich and stimulating learning environments that enable children to promote effectively social skills and physical development. However, one of the teachers from the same religious preschool explained that children's play activities did not depend on outdoor materials and equipment only but most children preferred playing creating their own play being in groups and pairs. For example, during free play time children preferred kicking balls made of old socks, skipping rope, climbing trees,

rolling on the grasses so that preschool did not believe playing with materials/equipment as the only option to promote social and physical development of the children(T4). She also said:

Of course we have outdoor play materials installed in the playground to fulfill minimum requirements of the national standard, but they are not convenient for children to play freely so that I let children to be engaged in pretend play activities which help them to promote social interaction.

Teachers and directors from different preschools also forwarded nearly similar ideas that outdoor play materials helped children promote physical and social development. Hence, when children engaged in outdoor play activities, they show observable progresses in their communication skills and social interaction, especially during hot season were allowed to play freely outside the classroom with the teachers close follow up in the play field even if play materials and equipment were unavailable; children could play creating their own play in the natural environment (T3). The teacher confirm that how natural environment was important children to be involved in creative play activities that help them to develop social interaction among their peers with the teachers close follow up, particularly during outdoor free play time. Children's social/emotional learning and development ensured when make as social interactions with their peers and others adults. As observation results showed in most preschool children's social interaction in the classroom were low because of large class size. It is clear that negative adult-child relationship between adults and children in the preschool environment make influence on children's socio-emotional development. In addition, teacher-child also low because usually teachers highly control in the classroom children not to make noise lashing stick on the desk or showing stick. In turns children lack confidence developing self-concepts and self-esteem

4.3.1. Outdoor supportive learning environment

The physical environment has a strong impact on children's learning and development. Physical environment that are well-designed and well facilitated would allow children to explore, experience and engaged in self-directed play and social interaction. However, most preschools, outdoor physical learning environment were not facilitated by the age appropriate play materials. Thus, nearly in all preschools free play activities are carried out outside the classrooms because of unavailability of the play materials and large class size. As the result, children engaged in different traditional play activities depending on their interests and needs in the play field; some types of creative play have cultural features. Occasionally it is unsafe like 'feres'... 'feres' meaning 'horse...horse' play that one child putting

on the back of the another child like riding horse turn by turn, throwing a pieces of stone distance and climbing trees and dropping to ground. Of course, children need access to a wide array of well-organized space, play materials and equipment which help them to promote physical strength and social interaction. Outdoor supportive learning environment could facilitate and provide new and challenging experiences and insure children's learning and development. But most preschools did not have interesting and facilitated learning environment to promote children's learning and development. However, NGO preschool have better interesting and stimulating outdoor physical environment with modern play materials even if the playground is small to use all available play materials; they have managed the situation making close follow up when children play providing modern important outdoor play equipment and materials based on the time scheduled, and children played according to their interests and choices.

Most preschools did not have obstacle free natural environment that helps children play to develop their gross motor or large muscles moving freely with their peers being in group and pair. Moreover, in many preschools the existing small numbers of play materials have made conflict among children. As a result, teachers were restless in order to manage play materials during outdoor free play time. Regarding the management of the outdoor play materials and activities one of the teachers from the private preschool stated:

Outdoor play time activities require teachers close follow up and material management or arrangement because of shortage of outdoor play materials. When I take children to the play field for the outdoor play activities first orient them how they will take turn and play keeping their turns and make close follow up entire free play time. Of course some children fight each other or push one another so this made me restless. The problem is that sometimes children are not willing to share play materials with their peers. However, they play in the field creating their own play activities being in groups female and male.

Of course, as observation result showed children play being in group and pair; older children prefer to play football which are made of old socks and small rubber balls in the field, and girls prefer to play skipping rope in group so they were happy engaging in different play activities during free play time. The preschools have limited outdoor play materials to serve all children equally. So nearly in all preschools child-initiated play activities were undergo either using inappropriate play materials/equipment or creating their own free play, or engaging in structured play in the natural environment.

When we see from the Table 8 in the government 'O' level program there were no man made outdoor play materials and equipment, but they play in the natural environment/play field as they like in group and pair being female and male. Children in this school were very happy obtaining opportunity to play in the school play field because they did not get such a chance to play when they go back to their home because all of them who were learning in government primary school-based preschool program or "O" class came from parents of low socio-economic back ground and inconvenient villages.

On the contrary those children who have come from parents of low socio-economic backgrounds and enrolled in the NGO preschool have got better opportunity to play with available and modern materials including computer programs so that they are advantageous when compared to the children in other preschools. A teacher from NOG preschool stated:

We have available important outdoor and indoor play materials but we have small outdoor place in order to supply all age appropriate and important outdoor play materials and equipment. However, we try to manage children to play with the age appropriate indoor and outdoor play materials and equipment. For example, free play and pretend play activities are carried out properly in the preschool...we follow Montessori model of teaching-learning approach/hand-on-learning method, especially indoor learning environment is safe and secured, with well-organized materials in each corner of the classroom (D6).

The private preschool (A) have interesting natural observable environment, but the outdoor play materials were not available and not well maintained. For this reason children prefer to play in the natural environment creating their own play and climbing trees rather than climbing man made climbing.

On the other hand small outdoor space was observed in the private preschool 'B', hence there were no available indoor and outdoor materials for the children to play freely. As observed the existing outdoor space was not sufficient to serve the existing numbers of the children(3x60) with limited play materials and inconvenient small space (see picture 4); however, children play in the existing space using few play materials keeping their turn with the teacher's guide because the space/layout is not convenient and safety. This is possible to realize that how space and lack of facilitate impact children participation in the indoor and outdoor free play activities. As it observed in the picture 4 the playground has only one gate and most of the time the door is locked to control primary school students who are learning in primary school level in the same school

sharing the same compound not to enter into the fenced playground. The existing materials in the preschools were seemed as if school fulfilled the requirement of national preschool education program standard (MOE, 2009).

As observed children were so happy when they engaged in free play activities in the preschools natural environment. Accordingly, one of the teachers (T8) from government preschool 'H' confirmed that children became happy when they were taken to the school natural environment of the play field, especially in hot season children are taken daily outside of the classroom for a long time and she gets children in circle to take attendance arranging in circle and spend time with children sitting in the center of the circle before or after the academic areas teaching-learning over (see picture 2). She also continued:

Children play different games sitting in circle and are engaged in storytelling activities, especially children are highly interested to listen and tell the oral traditional stories which initiated by children themselves...often they come with the traditional stories from their home and they are actively participated in different traditional circle time play activities.

As observed in picture 2 the teacher sat in the center of the circle to make follow up when children play a traditional circle time activities. However, she did not have assistant teacher instead she had assigned two elder children as monitors to help her managing children discipline.



Note: picture (2) by the researcher (2015)

As can see in the picture 2, it was one of the traditional outdoor play arrangements and children sat in the form of circle to play “Mahareben Ayachehu” meaning have you ever seen ‘my handkerchief’. In order to continue the play...a volunteer child takes a handkerchief (taking something symbolic of handkerchief) to lead the play running round of the circle that children sat to put the symbol of handkerchief behind one of the children but as the rule all children not allowed to turn backwards...but they can sense themselves as much as possible when he/she is moving round and round repeating the leading ‘phrase’ that all say... “Mahareben Ayachehu”... all responding... “Alayenim” ... [meaning all along ...No...No (we have not seen)]. she/he was continued asking whether they saw her/his handkerchief or not running/moving round and round to the circle and as she/he like ...put suddenly behind of the one child/back side and if a child find the handkerchief, takes and immediately moves around the circle in hurry following the leading child to hit [slightly], as the same time the leading child rush to sit on the place of the child who have found the handkerchief, otherwise no chance to sit anywhere. If a child did not see the handkerchief that was put behind his/her the ‘play leading child’ hit [slightly] on his/her back and the play game will be continued in such a way until the time limited by the teacher. Finally the teacher let them play freely in the play field. This kind of play was common in most preschools during circle time and very interesting play game for children.

Outdoor physical environment in preschool settings

As described by the researchers, well-designed and facilitated physical environment could foster children to build strong relationships with the world around them because physical environment and children’s development of cognitive and social competency have direct relationships (Moore 1994; Curtis & Carter, 1996; Moore 2002). Accordingly each of the research preschools outdoor physical environments was analyzed as follows. As observation result showed private preschool ‘A’ has wide play spaces for the children independent free play and teacher-guided plays. The preschool natural environment appearance was relatively attractive because there were different kinds of plants, trees, edibles; especially mangos, avocados, banana, lemons and coffee plants were available in the compound. However, the physical environment was not well organized with important age appropriate play equipment and materials. Of course the

physical environment/site is naturally attractive but plants were separated by fences and it also limited children's free movement during free play, and sometimes children were exposed for the fence accident.

The observation result showed that preschool 'B' found in the center of the community. However, the compound is very small and crowded because it serves both preschool children and primary school students in the same school compound which is surrounded by the school buildings. Although the school is surrounded by the natural plant; trees, edibles, there were no convenient enough place to use as the shade when children play during sunny time or hot season. A question was forwarded for director (D2) of private preschool 'B' regarding the convenience of the preschool physical environment for children's learning and development. He stated that:

We have outdoor physical environment and facility problems because we have small school compound ...we did not find land to facilitate age appropriate physical environment and to build additional classrooms even though we requested concerned bodies. Hence, the zone and town administrators are not volunteers to respond for the land request.

As observations results have shown preschool and primary school program was carried out in the same compound separating classrooms with wooden fences and children in both preschool and primary programs use the same play ground/field. The physical environment of the preschool was not convenient for children. It was not enough for children to play freely and to explore and experience the world round them. Sometimes teachers use science center to show different natural resources; models, pictures during free play time instead of let children for free play, but the children were not allowed to interact with the materials.

On the other hand religious preschool 'C' has a wide playground and interesting physical environment. There are different plants (coffee), big and small trees, edibles such as mango, avocado, and other various fruits in the compound better than private preschools. Children play freely climbing on the trees during break time, free play time and lunch time. The natural environment also helped children to explore and experience things around them, but the outdoor spaces do not obstacles free, because it was not organized according to the children age levels. In the case of religious preschool 'D' physical environment seemed convenient for free outdoor play activities because it is wide and somehow barriers free. But it was not well designed and organized according to

the children's age levels. The preschool separated from primary school with wooden fences. There were mango trees and other natural trees in front of the classrooms, bushes and small trees have in the school compound. Trees were used a shade like other preschools use for the circle time activities and during hot seasons as shade. Even though the natural physical environment of the preschool was attractive, it was not designed and organized with age appropriate play materials and equipment.

On the other hand community preschool 'E' was fenced by the/corrugated old metal sheets. The outdoor physical environment was not interesting. It is not wide enough to serve the existing numbers of the children at the school, especially at break and lunch times most children forced to set on verandah. The physical environment was not conducive for the outdoor play activities. For this reasons during hot season teachers and children were forced to be confined at the verandah because there were no trees, and plants in the compound. When children were taken to outside of the classroom usually teachers make close follow up to protect children from accidents. However, some children were encountered daily accident falling on the ground when they play pushing one another because the compound was small and not safety for children so that accidents were common at the children in the preschool. Concerning the conduciveness of the outdoor physical environment of the preschool director (D5) explained that their preschool physical environment was not comfortable for preschool children to move freely and play with their friends. She also described as follows:

If you see toilet, fences, dining room easily you can understand how the physical environment is difficult for children's to learn in a healthy way. The outdoor space of the preschool is inconvenient for children to move and play freely.

On the contrary NGO preschool 'F' outdoor physical environment is interesting and clean from any obstacles. However, the playground/field was not wide enough when compared to other preschool and less than national standard (1500m²). There are trees and plants surround the school, no grass but highly facilitated by the built environment by the traditional and modern material resources. The existing small field/playground was concrete and somehow it was not safety for children to play freely as they like.

As observed by the researcher, in this school there were a good physical environment and available outdoor play materials which help children to promote physical and social developments even if the playground is small, outdoor spaces were

used in a manageable way arranging the play materials. For example, outdoor space have shop corner and other modern materials used to pretend play and free plays. Of course, the preschool have made efforts outdoor physical environment to be comfortable, interesting, attractive and appropriate for the child so as to practice and refine skills across all aspects of learning and development.

As observation result showed the government preschools have good outdoor physical environment and wide playground/field in size compared to the private preschools because preschool children used already existing playground/field of the primary schools. Thus, in the schools there are large and small trees, plants and edibles or fruits which help children to explore and experience their environment. However, there were now planned, organized and facilitated play ground with necessary materials and equipment. Particularly government primary school-based preschool ['O' level] 'G7' children shared the same play ground/ field with primary school students during break times. Moreover, the school playground/field has safety problem as a result some children/students faced injury when running and play football (made of old socks and rages) in the field because teacher did not make important follow up. However, government primary school-based preschool (H8) or "O" level has better outdoor physical environment when compared to the above mentioned government school. Furthermore, the preschool have special outdoor place for preschool children to play games and other free play activities, especially during hot season trees used as the shelter/shade. Sitting under the trees, children learn and play different cultural games and engaged in oral traditional storytelling with the close teacher follow up so that the school outdoor physical environment has contributed for the children physical and social developments.

4.3.2. Outdoor play materials and resources

In the preschools, different types of outdoor materials are required to be available in number and quality. According to national new preschool establishment requirements, preschools expected to have outdoor and indoor play materials at least to fulfill national/regional minimum requirements to be licensed as a preschool. The major outdoor play materials that are clearly stated in national preschool education program standard are listed in Table 7. These materials are prerequisite for preschools to offer

license (MOE, 2009, p. 23). According to the national preschool education program standard the maximum number of children enrollment in a classroom should not be exceeded 40. The listed types and number of materials are expected to serve for the described number of children as mentioned in Table 7. As described in this document, if the number of children exceeded 40, the number of materials also shall be increased.

Table7 : Expected outdoor play materials in a preschool

No.	Type of material	Required number of materials	Number of children in a classroom
1	Balls	10	40
2	Tyers	10	40
3	Swinging	2	40
4	Balance	2	40
5	Slide	2	40
6	Mary-go-round	2	40
7	Slider	2	40
8	Tubes	2	40
9	Sand box	2	40

Note: From preschool education program standard (MOE, 2009, p.23)

As the observation result showed, however in most preschools the existing play materials were not enough to serve children based on their favorite because of large class size. Although these mentioned play materials are existed in some preschools, they were not age appropriate, well maintained and safety. Even some preschools did not have such outdoor play materials. In most preschools materials that were installed over the ground look as if to fulfill the national preschool education program standard even if the materials were not properly functioning. Besides, the existing materials in the schools were conventional, outdated and not traditional. A study that was carried out on outdoor play materials in the early 20th on the children’s playgrounds shows that the materials that were equipped with standardized, structured and often installed over the ground, currently outdated and not safety (Rothenberg, and Beasley, 1974; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2005; Spencer and Wright, 2014). However, contemporary playgrounds included multi-purposes and linked structures that provided various means for entry and exit, and areas or fixtures for dramatic play; junk playgrounds incorporated various types of moveable materials and tools for children to use in constructing their own play structures, rather than having conventional play equipment. However, such kinds of unsaved play

materials are still used in the research preschools as stated in the preschool education program standard and they are considered as the prerequisite so as to establish preschool even in the national level (MOE, 2009). The Table 8 below shows actually existing outdoor play materials and equipment in the preschools. Thus, this Table is used to compare the minimum requirement of the outdoor play materials that required to be existed in a preschool (Table 7) and actually existing outdoor play materials in Table 8.

Table 8: Outdoor play materials and equipment in the preschools

Preschool	old tyres	Balancing	Climbing	Swings/ seesaw	slides	cycling	Sandbo x	No. of children in a classroom	other
A	x	1	2	1	1	1	x	60	
B	12	1	x	1	1	1	x	63	
C	12	1	1	1	1	1	x	41	
D	3	1	1	1	1	1	x	35	
E	3	1	1	3	1	1	x	40	
F	8	1	1	1	1	1	yes	63	Shop, hollow tubes, pretend play materials
G	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	70	
H	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	170	

Note: from field/observation

As observed in Table 8, outdoor play materials and equipment are not accessible when compared to the number of the children in the preschools. For example, the number of children in private preschools A and B were 60 in a classroom on average; however, the existing numbers of outdoor play materials were not coincided to the number children in a preschool. Children display the highest levels of physical activity on playground/field that they have used a combination of a few locally made equipment and some purchased materials. As observed the described materials were not age appropriate and accessible. Spencer and Wright (2014) state that all the materials in the playground should be age appropriate for the children to promote children's learning and development.

However, as showed in the Table 8, majority of the preschools did not accomplish even the national minimum standard and the existing outdoor materials in the preschools were not durable, well maintained and less in number so as to serve the existing number

of preschool children. Thus, almost all preschools did not have fulfilled the national minimum requirements of the play materials that are expected to be accessible, attractive and barrier free for children to play. Indeed, relatively in the NOG preschool there were available age appropriate play materials and equipment in the better planned and organized spaces. On the contrary in the government primary school-based preschool programs there were no any locally made and/or purchased play materials.

Moreover, the existing outdoor play materials in some preschools hurt children because materials were not properly functioning and spaces were not adequate so far. For example, private preschool 'A' outdoor spaces were occupied by the large and small trees, plants, edibles, and unsafe surface with few play materials which prohibited children's free movement. Besides, the play field was covered by the small wooden fences to protect small plants from children feet and hands (see picture 3). During free play time usually children play hide and seek but guards were strict to control children not to touch small plants and enter into the fences. The existing play materials also do not equally serve all children and they were forced to wait for ones turn (see picture 3)



Note: Picture (3) by the researcher (2015)

Because of shortage of play materials and equipment children play creating their own play during outdoor free play time, and break time in the play yard/field. Actually, children need access to a wide array of well-organized play materials and equipment which help them to promote physical, social/emotional and cognitive development. Nevertheless, the existing equipment and materials in the school were not safe, clean, attractive, repaired and accessible for children.

As observed in preschool 'B' there was available play materials in the store but they did not practically serve children because of small outdoor space to organize and arrange play materials for the children play activities. However, some play materials were arranged in the 'cage' like fenced place (see picture 4). It was also not available for children to play as they like, because it has only one gate that was often locked to prevent other primary school students not to enter into the fence because as it has been mentioned earlier both primary school students and preschool children shared the same compound.



Note: Picture (4) by the researcher (2015)

As observed in picture 4, the play materials existing place is not convenient for children to play and move freely so as to promote motor development. When children push one another the wooden fences around the play materials might hurt the children so that inadequate place and unavailable materials not only affect free movement of the children, but also it could affect children's social behavior because getting so many children to play within a small space at a time made children to fight each other. Apparently, when number of children play in a small place, it leads children to develop more aggressive and destructive behavior. Furthermore, in some preschools the existing play grounds were inadequate. As a result teachers usually make close follow up during free play children not to be exposed for accident, especially when they compete to share the existing few play materials, but teachers give orientation how they could keep their turn patiently and how could they use play materials that are installed in the playground before taking the children for free outdoor play activities.

Although children come preschool with concept knowledge, in some preschools teachers showed empathy and provided orientations regarding the play materials usage in

a new school environment and help children to adapt and feel free in the school natural and built environments. As showed in picture 5 a teacher orients children supposed to learn concepts that naturally occurred outside and transfer into the new learning environment through active exploration, using their sense organs (e.g. hands, eyes). For example, as observed (picture 5) the teacher oriented slightly pushing a boy to put his legs in a running position at the back and fro holding the swing chair gently. Then, the boy also handled the chain carefully and the teacher started pushing gently and then slightly harder and harder until the boy was settled himself or develop confidence.



Note: picture (5) by the researcher (2015)

Thus, the teacher oriented scaffolding children to develop self-regulation, self-confidence and risk taking skills when outdoor play materials were used, especially to play materials that are installed over the ground.

4.3.3. Outside classroom facilities

Finding of the observation revealed that most preschools' outdoors were not facilitated appropriately for children healthy learning and development. Moreover, in the preschools there were lack of clean toilets, pure water and inadequate outdoor spaces and facilities. Another challenge for the lack of outside the classroom facilities was establishment of both preschool and primary school programs within the same school compound. Even preschools which have wide school compound had low facilities, safety and hygiene problems. As the observation and interview results showed most preschools have sanitation problems because of scarcity of water supply.

Sanitation and health

Sanitation is very important and prerequisite for the children's healthy development and learning because health problem could directly affect children's learning and developmental activities. Findings of the study revealed that because of health problem children absenteeism was common problem in most preschools. Thus, the study area being low land (found under the rift valley), the weather condition is hot and sunny so that in such a weather condition children often affected by the malaria and other water borne diseases. The major health problem was malaria that caused by Plasmodium Vivax and the Plasmodium Falciparum, mainly children was affected by the [Plasmodium] that can affect people at all age level. Even if malaria is common problem for all people, highly children were affected. As observation and document review showed another serious health problem that caused for the children absenteeism was influenza that occurred because of sanitation problem; unavailability of pipe [pure] water. Hence, shortage of pure pipe water is also common in the whole town yearly.

On the other hand most preschools did not have first aid rooms and easily reachable medical consultant when children faced accident or health problem. Although there were obvious health problem in the preschools, there were no medical consultants in the preschools except NGO preschool. Hence, in other preschools there was no access of getting medical consultant in the preschools or nearby preschools. When children got health problem, preschools send children back to their home calling parents/caregivers instead of taking to clinic.

Water facility

As mentioned above preschools have sanitation problem because of lack of water for drinking, cleaning and washing purposes. Some preschools used ground water like NGO preschool; however; other faced greater challenges to find water. On the other hand when pipe water rarely presented, there were also shortages of water taps to serve the existing number of children at a time. Most preschools have two to three functioning water taps in the schools such problems did not only affect children's healthy learning activities but also could affect social behavior because when they compete to find water they made quarrel each other. Even if finding the pure pipe water regularly is difficult/NGO preschool have its own ground water for the sanitation services such as

hand washing and to clean the toilet. So children in this preschool could wash their hands freely after toileting. On the contrary, the rest of preschools obtained pipe water in the interval of two or three weeks. This was the major cause for sanitation problem, and consequently children exposed for influenza and eventually for school absenteeism. Accordingly, directors and teachers were asked how they would overcome the problems. Director (D6, T6) from NGO preschool explained that:

We have our own ground clean water so that we do not have sanitation problem even we supply free water service for the community because the town itself has water supply problem. In the town water is distributed using shift system within two or three interval of weeks.

In contrast private preschool director and teacher (D1, T1) stated:

Finding water is a major problem in our preschool. In order to overcome the problem children often come with water from their homes. Besides, we buy water from far places for all water requiring services such as washing hands for the primary and preschool children. I think... sanitation problem exposed children for diarrhea and other water born worms. This is not only our problem that children may be infected at their home because of sanitation problems. However, we are trying to overcome the challenges buying water from other places and letting children to come with pure drink water.

As observed by the researcher, in some preschools water from the water tanks kept for a long time were used for drinking because in all parts of the town water is distributed by the shift system between two or three weeks intervals so that the preschools teachers and directors believed that the teaching-learning process influenced by the lack of available water supply (D3, D5, T3, T5). Furthermore, directors and teachers also had explained that shortage of water in the town have created sanitation problem because lack of water supply in the town has affected children health in school and at home (D1, D4, D5, T1, T2, T3, T4, T5). In general in some preschools water was kept for a long times in the water tanks for drinking and other sanitation services while some preschools did not get water at all when the pipe water supply shift system over, and children were forced to bring water from their home in bottles.

4.3.4. Toilet facilities

In one way or another lack of sanitation and health problems obviously can affect preschools education provision and children attendance. As mentioned earlier nearly all preschools have sanitation problem except NGO preschool. NGO preschool has good hygiene, age appropriate toilets and hand basins, rest of the schools did not have adequate

toilets and hand basins. Separate toilet for girls and boys were not available in most preschools instead teachers and children use common toilet/dry latrine with separated door in the same gate. The existing dry latrine within each preschool was not safety and clean. Moreover, the existing toilets in the preschool did not match with the exiting numbers of children and teachers as it has seen in Table9. This table also shows the types of toilet, availability, safety and sanitation problems.

Table 9: Preschool toilets

Code of preschool	Ratio of toilets to the No. of children	Type of toilet	Number of hole/ dry latrine	Type of building	Sanitation
A/private	1: 40-50	dry latrine	4	Cement	Relatively good
B/private	1:38-50	dry latrine	3	Cement	good
C/religious	1:50-60	dry latrine	3	Sheets of metal	poor
D/ religious	1: 35-40	dry latrine	2	Mud +sheet of metal	poor
E/community	1:40-45	dry latrine	6	Sheet of metals	poor
F/NGO	1:41-50	Squat attached floor	4	Cement	Very good
G/government	1: 20-25	dry latrine	8	Cement	poor
H/government	1: 22-25	dry latrine	8	Cement	poor

Sources: Observation note (2015&2017)

The shortage of the appropriate toilet services would affect children's health. As a result, school attendances/education provision challenged in some preschools because of unavailability of toilet services. As a result, children in some preschools were forced to control bowels and sometimes they could not control their bowels and released on their clothes. When we see the ratio of toilets to the number the children, it was more than 1:20. The ratio of toilet could play influential factor in time management...while a lot of time was spent when children waiting for their turn. Waiting for ones turn for a long time was difficult for children because they are not capable enough to keep turn tolerantly, to make self-control and to accommodate other children's needs. When some children released out their bowels at their clothes other children were laughing at those children

who were released out their bowels at their clothes. As a result, they felt shame and discomfort to interact with their peers and teachers. Hence, children's social interaction affected and lack confidence even they go back again to the school. As a result, they stayed for weeks at home; it was common problem, especially in community preschool (a teacher and a parent informal interview).

On the other hand some of the dry latrines that were existing in some preschools was not clean and safety for children to use their bowels/urine, especially the problems are serious in religious preschools (see picture 6&7). As a result, children forced to use bowels at the corners of the preschool fences and rarely in the field of the preschools.



Note: Picture (6) by the researcher (2016/17)



Note: picture (7) by the researcher (2016/17)

Dining room

As observation result showed preschools that provided full day preschool program have different types of dining rooms. For example, some of the preschools walls and roofs dining rooms are made of sheet metals and the others were built roofs only with open walls. However, government preschools did not provide such a program because the education program offered half a day for the children who came from the poor family. The existing dining rooms in most preschools were not adequate and clean. Moreover, in some preschools children faced difficulties to keep their lunch/meal in a safety places because sometimes unintentionally one child took another child's meal during snack and/or lunch time because all children kept on one place/table and their containers were mostly seemed similar, particularly the problem is common in community preschool. Regarding such a problem one parent from community preschool (E) stated that:

I usually prepare lunch for my child properly depending on her interest and need. She is only child ...I usually take care of her and I prepare dietetic/healthy food but one day my child stay up to 3:30 PM in the preschool without having lunch. When I arrived the preschool to take her back to home, she told me as she felt hungry and as my neighbor child took and ate her lunch because the child who have had my child's lunch knew well as I prepared delicious food based on my child interest...so this is why she took and ate my child's lunch. She continued that (her mother is too lazy and careless not take care of her children). Another problem is that preschool teachers are careless to take care of the children. Since they keep all children lunch in the same place, they have to make follow up when children take their lunch (a parent informal interview).

Regarding this problem a teacher from the same school (E) asked how the problem occurred. She said:

“... really such kind of problem sometimes happened in our preschool because of containers similarities. Moreover, all children's lunches kept on one table/place...” we do not have shelves or drawers to keep children's lunches according to each child name”. To overcome the problem as much as possible assistant teacher makes close follow up when children take their lunch, but sometimes similar problems were occurred (Informal interviews with a teacher).

As observed, such kinds of facility problems were common in all full day preschools settings except NGO preschool. Other preschools do not have shelves for each child to keep his/her lunch. As a result, just they keep at a certain place on the table or on floor.

Rest room

On the other hand, there were no prepared adequate rest rooms for children nearly in all preschools. Hence, most research preschools did not have rest rooms instead children were taken outside the classroom either for free play or to play games and, sing songs. Hence, rest programs were adjusted children to be engaged for the storytelling, music and movement programs in the private, religious and community preschools. However, in some preschools, rest times have taken in the verandah and under the trees shade, especially in community preschool children's have taken rest time in verandah of the classroom. Regarding the rest time teachers explained that:

We do not have available rest room...for this reason we took children outside of the classroom to take rest under the trees shadows and we get them engaged in oral traditional storytelling and play games (T1, T3, T4). But teacher (T5) justified that "we do not have facilitated rest room... for this reason we provide mats in verandah children to take rest because we have wide verandah. We use verandah, especially during the hot season so as to children take nap.

As observed by the researcher, in this preschool children often taken outside of the classroom in the afternoon to take rest on verandah laying down on mats but children did not take rest instead they pushed one another and fighting each other because of large numbers of children the verandah could not accommodate children from all classrooms at the same time. In order to manage the whole group discipline, teachers kicked children not make noise and fight each other.

4.3.5. Classroom physical environment

According to the Ethiopian national preschool education program standard (MOE, 2009) and ECE strategic plan (MOE, 2010) preschool classrooms physical environment expected to have conducive learning environment and facilitated (air, light, windows, finishing), seating (desks and chairs) and materials arrangements, displays so as to promote children's learning and development. However, as observation and interview results showed most preschools did not accomplish the expected classroom facilities even though most preschools were constructed from different materials. For example, in most preschools, the classrooms have cemented floors and walls, metal/steel door and windowpane. As findings of the observation revealed; however, each preschool had its own barriers concerning the classroom facilities in relation to class size, spaces, play materials, displays, and teaching materials etc. Besides, designs of classroom physical

environment such as classroom size, layout, furniture, lighting, seating arrangement had also influenced each preschool's teaching-learning process.

Furthermore, in most preschool, the size of the classrooms' physical environment were not fulfilled national preschool physical classroom standard. For example, the recommended size of national standard for a classroom in the preschool is 63 square meters to accommodate maximum numbers of 40 children in a certain classroom. However, most preschools did not have accomplished this standard. However, NOG 'preschool' has accomplished all requirements of classroom physical facility standard with available necessary play materials and teaching aids. The classrooms are interesting and attractive for children. Moreover, displays, charts, posters and children's work and names were also available on the walls of the classrooms even though the number of children in a classroom exceeded from the recommended numbers (40). In addition, play materials were organized on the shelves at the child height level, and the classrooms have enough space for both children and teachers movement including computer classroom (see picture 8& 9). So, the NGO preschool has better classrooms, physical environment and facilities when compared to the other preschools. The classrooms are safe and free from any harmful things and have enough spaces in the classroom for teachers and children to move freely.



Note picture (8) by the researcher (2016) Note: picture (9) by the researcher (2016)

On the other hand community preschool (E) have similar size of the classroom like NGO preschool. Important demonstrations were available on the walls of the classrooms like displays, charts, posters and student names were available, but children

artwork did not have observed on the walls. Besides, the classrooms have enough space for the teachers and children to move freely. Alike NGO seating arrangement in the classrooms were flexible chair and table instead of fixed desks. However, flexible seating arrangement was relied on teachers teaching approaches (see picture, 10). There were no shelves for both children and teachers in the classrooms. Of course there were few play materials and toys on the table at the one corners of the classroom, but these play materials were not available and not match with the existing numbers of children in the a classroom.



Note: picture (10) by the researcher (2016)

On the contrary government preschools were poorly facilitated because originally the classrooms were constructed many years ago for primary school students. For example one of the government school (G) classrooms was constructed earthen/clay and finishing materials were not applied. The classroom is also not convenient, crowded, walls were with large holes in the partition part of the next classroom. Thus, government ‘O’ level preschools (G) classroom physical environment were not attractive and crowded with large number of children. The classroom facilities were low and there were also no enough spaces teachers and children to move freely in the classroom. The classroom was also gloomy, because there was no enough light and air in the classroom (see picture 11). There were no any supportive teaching aids and play materials in the classroom and displays on the walls.

In both government preschools, the seating arrangements were fixed on rows of desks, especially preschool 'G' classroom physical environment and facilities were the poorest of all settings in the study sites. The classroom was not interesting; the walls have holes, the floor and ceiling do not have finishing, there were small wooden windows on the upper end of the wall, available light is not regulated in the classroom and the classroom was crowded (more than 70 children). The open holes on the walls easily transmitted sound from the next classroom and sounds listened and noises disturbed children learning in the next classroom.



Note: picture (11) by the researcher (2016)

As demonstrated at picture 11, the classroom do not have enough light and air because windows were very small to supply natural light and to regulate fresh air in this crowded classroom.

Furthermore, as observed the private preschools nearly have similar classroom structures and were crowded. The classroom facilities were also not adequate, but the windows are convenient to regulate available air and natural light. However, in the LKG and UKG classrooms there were no play materials, and toys. These preschools have also small size of the classrooms (about 42 square meters each classroom) which are less than recommended by the national preschool education program standard, and teach accommodated more than 60 children in a classroom. The classrooms were not attractive and crowded so that children and teachers could not move freely in the classroom.

However, the classrooms have available displays on the walls like posters, alphabet charts, and time tables and local teaching aids but there were no children works on the walls. On the other hand observation results showed that the religious preschools have small classrooms with low facilities, but enough natural light and air was regulated in the classrooms because the windows are wide and made of metal and panes. On the walls, displays, posters and charts were available but there were no play materials and toys in the classrooms. The classrooms are not risk free for both the teachers and children to move freely because the seating arrangement was rows of desks with separated chairs and crowded.

Most preschools' classrooms facilities were poor and play materials and toys did not have in the corners of classrooms. In most preschools, the classroom corners were not facilitated with age appropriate play materials and equipment for children free play activities. Majority of the research preschools government, private and religious classrooms did not have shelves for teachers and children to keep their properties, instead teachers kept children's exercise books, textbooks and their own teaching materials on the small table and children's desk (see picture.12)



Note: picture (12) by researcher (2015)

The following Table 13 uses as the summary and helps to understand the classroom physical environment of the preschools, safety and facilities relating to the national preschool classroom size standards (MOE, 2009).

Table 10: Preschools classroom physical environment and facilities

Preschool by the code	No of children in a classroom	Classroom size in m ²	Window in m ²	Shelf	Chalkboard in m ²	Teacher chair in a classroom	Teacher table in a classroom	Students seating arrangement
A	60	6x7=42	1.5x3=5.4	NO	1.5x2=3	1	1	rows
B	60	7x6=42	1.5x3=5.4	1 for teacher only .40x.50=2.00 in each classroom	1.5x2=3	1	1	rows
C	41	6x7=42	1.5x3=5.4	NO	1x2.40=2.4	1	1	rows
D	35	6x5=30	1.6x3=4.8	NO	1X2.4=2.4	1	1	rows
E	60	7x9=63	1.80x3=5.4	NO	1.5x2=3	2 in a classroom	1	Flexible chair &table
F	63	7x9=63	1.18x3=5.4	4 in a classroom at child height-level	1.5x2=3	1	1	Flexible chair &table
G	70	7x9= 63	1.00x.85=.85	NO	1X1.5=1.5	1	1	rows
H	170	9x12=108	1.8x3=5.4	NO	2X1.5=3	1	no	rows

Note: from field observation & preschools document (2014/15)

Researcher tried to explore the existing preschools classroom physical facilities based on the national preschools physical environment standard to know whether they meet or not the standard and to explore how the physical facilities affected the preschool education practices in relation to children's holistic learning and development. As explained earlier the Ethiopia national preschool education program standard (MOE, 2009), the classroom size recommended to be 7x9=63 square meters to serve maximum

number of 40 children in a classroom. However, as observed in Table 13 most preschools do not meet the recommended national requirements except preschool 'E' and 'F' even if the number of children in a classroom exceeded more than 40. So, the classroom physical environment has influenced the ECE provision in line with children's learning and development.

As preschool directors and teachers' interviews and the researcher observation results showed most of the research preschools have financial problem to facilitate physical environment of the classroom, mainly the government and religious preschools faced financial problem to accomplish their classrooms facilities as recommended in the national preschool education program standard. Thus, these preschools did not have enough budgets to make the classrooms more attractive and conducive. For example, director and teacher from the religious preschool 'C' explained how they met shortage of financial resources as follows:

We have financial problems to facilitate classroom physical environment with important infrastructure and play materials because we collect the minimum education fee (80 Birr or \$5.00) per a month from parents for each child...we do not have another sources of income (fund) to facilitate the classrooms purchasing necessary play materials. I think...almost we serve the community providing free education opportunity even through parents claim us for paying this amount of education fee per a month for a child because of their awareness and economic background problems (D3&T3). However, the teachers' monthly payment/salary is about 800 Birr or \$50.00. She also said, "mind you ...this is so difficult to overcome economic challenges but we are happy serving the poor".

Financial shortage is common problem in religious preschools. Accordingly, director (D4) from the religious preschool 'D' states that:

We do not have enough budgets to facilitate our preschool classrooms with important play materials, equipment and toys because school board and the "owner church" did not understand what we say, they supply only chalk and chalkboard so that we are challenged to provide age appropriate education for the children creating conducive classroom physical environment.

Both preschools were established to serve the poor people in the community with minimum education fee. Particularly, the religious preschool 'D' has low classroom facilities. As it has been explained earlier teachers' turnover was also high in this preschool because of low payment.

4.3.6. Large class size

The interview and observation results have shown that the average class size in a classroom was large. For example, numbers of the children in a classroom were: in private preschools 40- 60, religious 35-45 (in small classrooms), community 45-50, NGO 60-65 and government 'O' level 70-170 on average. This shows that the preschool teachers handle large numbers of children in a small classroom. As discussed before, this was opposite to the ministry of education recommended maximum number of 40 children per teacher and assistant teacher in a classroom (7x9=63 square meters). Because of the crowded classroom play-based curriculum implementation was influenced by the teacher-centered teaching approaches. However, a large number of children in a classroom/large class size was considered as benefits in private preschools for cost minimization/increase income, while large class size in government preschools were considered as lack of trained teachers and extra classrooms in the primary schools. So in these preschools, the classrooms physical environments are not conducive to provide play-based age appropriate education.

In most preschools, especially in government primary school-based preschools ('O' classes) utilization of the play materials, teachers' lessons preparation times and time for small group activities are highly affected because of the crowded classroom/a large class size. From the eight research preschools seven of them use mostly their classrooms for academic areas learning (e.g. reading, writing, arithmetic and science) because the classrooms physical environment is not convenient for play-based/child-centered learning activities. As a result, children did not engage in free play activities in the classrooms, and because of large class size child-to-child and adult-to-child social interactions were low. For example, when children make noise/disturb a classroom, teacher forced to punish and lash table repeatedly. As a result, gaps in social interactions appeared between children and teachers. As observed in some preschools, teachers did not allow children to go to toilet frequently. However, children forced to wet themselves and feel shame when other children laugh at a child as mentioned earlier because children were highly controlled by the teachers to follow academic areas learning in the classroom so that most classroom activities were carried out on table or chalkboard. Findings of the study also showed that classroom facility problem somehow triggered children to develop

undesirable behaviors. As a result teachers usually have stick or cane in their hands either to point or pound when children make noise or classroom rules are broken.

Findings of the observation result also revealed that most preschool teachers were faced difficulties to evaluate children's daily performances on time and to make one-to-one contact with children because of large class size. For example, the private and religious preschools teachers are obliged to evaluate the children's daily performances, and they used their maximum efforts to evaluate such activities because parents expected their children's daily performance to be evaluated. Accordingly, teachers explained how they made efforts to evaluate the daily activities of the children as follows:

Even if we are dealing daily with the children in a crowded classroom, we are obliged to evaluate children's daily activities (T1&T2). Teacher (T2) continued ...I have more than 60 children in my classroom but I interact with individual child and evaluate their daily activities as much as possible.... Although evaluating children's daily activities make me tiresome, it has made teacher-parents' relationships more strong and as the same times increased parent's responsibility.

Generally, teachers faced challenges to carry out other activities as planned to accomplish within a given period of times. Moreover, space in the classrooms was not convenient to organize children in large and small groups to carry out cooperative learning activities.

4.3.7. Seating arrangement

As mentioned earlier, the seating arrangements in the classrooms are one of the basic challenges in the preschool education provision. However, most preschools used the rows of desks seating arrangements to manage large class size. The studies carried out by the educators on the rows of desks and chairs seating arrangement have shown that rows of desks are considered to be appropriate to individual child work and increase their time on-task (Galton et al, 1999; Hastings, 1995; Wheldall & Lam, 1987). Hence, rows of desks seating arrangement could increase positive social interaction between teachers and children, since the children in the rows of desks arrangement are able to concentrate for the activities that are carried out in the classroom. As this research result have shown classrooms that are arranged in the rows of desks seating served children relatively in a better to follow academic areas learning, maintaining classroom discipline compared to seating at table in the large class size because teachers always sit or stand in front of the

children and make series eye contacts when they perform activities. Teachers from more crowded government preschools or 'O' levels were asked how they could manage large class size. One of the teachers described as follows:

Rows of desks seating arrangement make children more attentive and less to make disturb the class because I usually make direct eyes contact to the class. Moreover, I assign monitors (the elder children) at each row when I write activities on the chalkboard and evaluate students activities sitting on the chair.

Teacher (T7) from another government school explained that rows of desks seating arrangement were a convenient type of seating to manage large class size in a small classroom. She continued:

In our preschool situation, rows of desks seating arrangement are only option to overcome a large class size. Hence, we have a large class size (i.e. more than 70 children in a classroom). Although the classroom is crowded, I did not encounter to manage children in the classroom because of rows of desks seating arrangement. It helped me to control classroom discipline making face-to-face eyes contact to the children and children also follow lessons attentively and listen carefully what I teach and say in the classroom. Beside, rows of desks seating arrangement help children know their fixed place when they usually enter into classroom and they take their seats without disturbing others. So, in my opinion it is best way to handle a large class size since we do not have other options.

On the other hand the private and religious preschool teachers have forwarded almost similar opinions as realized by the government preschool teachers. But teachers from community preschool have supported both rows of desks seating arrangement and separate tables and chairs or flexible seating arrangement because in the classrooms separate tables and chairs are available for each child and the flexible seating arrangement were used in the classroom. Other teachers also explained that more the class size, the more they became tired physically and mentally. This also affected teachers' one-to-one interaction with the children in the classrooms. They also described as follows:

Teaching in the crowded classroom made me too tiresome but I overcome equally sharing time for the outdoor and indoor activities. As mentioned before managing 170 children in a classroom (in a small hall) is not easy. However, rows of desks seating arrangement better system to manage properly but it is difficult to interact with individual child (T8). I belief that rows of desk seating arrangement is effective means to manage a large class size/crowded classroom providing age appropriate learning activities, singing songs along with children. But it is difficult to evaluate all children's activities at a time and to run teaching-learning activities according to the lesson plan (T7).

As observation result also showed the preschools used various options to manage large class size. For example, some preschools increase numbers of the assistant teachers and other use rows of seating arrangement in the classrooms to manage a large class size and to provide appropriate learning and developmental activities. Accordingly director (D5) explained:

In our preschool the best mechanism to provide appropriate education in a crowded classroom and to minimize teachers' burden we increase numbers of assistant teachers in a classroom from one to two. So, using such a method our preschool became effective in managing large class size.

The director explanations are coincided with what practically observed in the preschool that so as to manage large class size, the preschool assigned two female assistant teachers in each classroom. As a result, the preschool is effective in maintaining classroom discipline and teaching-learning activities.

4.4. Challenges/barriers in Preschool Education provision

Although in one way or another challenges of ECE provision were discussed under each emerged themes, specifically the major challenges/barriers are also analyzed and identified based on the research questions and objectives of the study. What are the challenges/barriers for children's learning and development? Accordingly, three themes analyzed in response to research question. These are: *1) lack of teachers' competence; 2) Teachers' motivation; 3) impacts of supportive environment; 4) awareness and negative attitudes of the people towards education of CWDs.*

As interviews, observations and document analysis results showed, the preschools have encountered many challenges in providing early childhood education or in preschool curriculum implementation because of: lack of trained teachers, traditionally teachers held academic areas focused teaching-learning trends, teachers' previous teaching-learning experiences and lack of teachers' motivation/the lowest payment.

4.4.1. Lack of teachers competence

Accordingly, teachers and directors described teachers' competence problems as one of the major challenges to provide appropriate education in the preschools. One of the directors/proprietors from private preschool 'A' stated that even if they have important material resources, finding competent or trained teachers were a great challenge because there was no special preschool teachers training center or institutes in the zone or regional level. As observation and document analysis results realized some of

the teachers have 10 or 3 months certificate and they did not obtain additional training opportunities which enable them to implement current new integrated curriculum. Thus, the teachers training gap in preschool education programs is common challenge in all preschools settings. For example; summer-in-service education program opportunity or other training programs did not provide for teacher to upgrade their knowledge. One of the religious preschool teachers explained concerning teachers training gap as follows:

I always wish to obtain additional training and upgrade my knowledge in summer-in-service but no chance to get summer in-service training program opportunity because once a teacher hired as a preschool teacher, nobody think to facilitate teachers to upgrade their education levels. I think... lack of such education opportunity for teachers has influenced the new curriculum implementation because teachers do not get opportunity to add new knowledge through in-service or pre-service programs (3).

Furthermore, lack of trained teachers in the preschools is one of the major challenges to implement the new integrated play-based preschool curriculum, especially in the government preschools. As a result, in the government primary school-based preschools ('O' classes) the new integrated play-based preschool curriculum was not implemented even though the curriculum materials were supplied. Accordingly, one of the directors explained:

The new integrated play-based curriculum is not well organized and standardized so that it is difficult for teachers to implement without obtaining training/background knowledge. For this reason the new curriculum is not still implemented in our school.

Although preschool have many challenges to implement this curriculum, lack of trained teachers are the major challenge in government preschools or "O" levels program because hiring teachers and supplying necessary resources are mandate of the Woreda education office, but this office did not make efforts to accomplish its responsibility assigning teaches and facilitating in-service preschool training program for the government school teachers. In general lack of trained teachers is common challenge in all types of programs to provide appropriate ECE for children, especially to implement the new integrated play-based curriculum.

Teachers' previous teaching experiences

As observation and interview results revealed, teachers' previous teaching experiences were another challenge to implement the new integrated ECE curriculum in the preschools because traditionally teachers held separated subject focused teaching-learning experiences are negatively influenced the implementation of the new integrated play-based preschool curriculum. In addition, private preschools teachers were influenced by the preschool proprietors previously held thought to implement more of academic areas curricula. Hence, all participant teachers were reluctant to implement the new integrated preschool curricula because of teachers' previous held traditional teaching-learning experiences. On the other hand preschools were not interested Amharic is being instructional language. Accordingly, teachers from private and religious preschools stated that parents' interests are English language to be instructional language but Woreda forced them Amharic to be instructional language so that there were still conflict between preschools and Woreda education office. However, as it has been discussed before English was informally used side by side to the Amharic as the instructional language in all preschools depending on 'preschools' willingness and parents' interest (T3, T4).

On top of that, many teachers have training gap to implement the new curriculum. As a result, teachers followed previously held curriculum academic areas focused and teacher-centred approaches, while the current curriculum is integrated and play-based/child-centred. Since curriculum implementation undergo through the interaction of the children and teachers planned learning activities, teachers' instructional strategies and teachers training gap have made a great influence on preschool education provision.

4.4.2. Teachers' motivation

Teachers who are working in ECE program tend to earn much lower salaries compared to-teachers at primary or higher education levels. In many countries, "in Sub Sahara Africa for example, salaries are under US \$ 50 a month" (UNESCO-BREDA, 2010:44), and teachers were suffered from low levels of regular payments, especially in privately based preschools. This is also true in the research area that preschool teachers' salary was 400 to 1200 Birr (\$ 15 to 44.5) per a month. In some preschools there was low commitment among teachers in implementing preschool curriculum to promote children learning and development. Teaching in preschools, especially in government schools was

stressful for teachers because they earn 400 Birr (\$15) per a month. In general teachers are not motivated teaching in preschools because of low payments. For this reason they are looking for better job and teachers' turnover is high, either they change preschool to preschool or left for other organizations searching better salary. For example, when the researcher made journey for additional information after a year, one of the government school teacher had left the preschool and she was hired as a guard in the hospital that share the same fence with the school seeking better salary. However, it was not better work when compared to teaching children but salary was better 1326 (\$ 51) because before her life was stressful as she was 'shared her views to the researcher' when she was working in the preschool even she did not fulfill her basic needs earning 400 Birr (\$15) a month. In contrast this might degrade working as a teacher because culturally illiterate persons employed as a guard. As observed there were also three preschools that paid 800 to 1200 Birr (\$ 30 to 44.5) when data was gathered. Regarding the teachers' salary, directors explained that most of the experienced teachers who have preschool certificates had left the preschools and hired in other preschools which paid relatively better salary so that preschools are challenged because of high teachers turnover(D3, D4). One of the teachers from the religious preschool stated:

I have more than 15 years' experience teaching in preschool and I have certificate in preschool education but I earn 800 Birr (\$30) per a month. So now it is difficult to me to overcome economic challenges. My colleagues left for other preschools searching better salary. Now I am also looking for better salary. I hope one day I will leave this preschool (T3).

Teachers also explained that to overcome their economic challenges daily they gave tutorial program for children after the end of class (3:00) from Monday to Friday for an hour based on the parents' interest. Another teacher shared this idea and explained that:

Tutorial program is helpful for both teachers and children that "...for teachers as remuneration and for children to promote additional literacy and numeracy skills development...) because we can make one-to-one interaction to children at a time but in a crowded classroom making one-to-one interaction is difficult so that tutorial program has good advantage for both teachers and children.

It is evident that teachers have low motivation to teach in preschools because of low payment. Thus, teachers were challenged because of economic problem to accomplish their responsibility in regular classes looking for tutorial program to earn additional money. Accordingly, Mmbaga (2002) argues that teachers lack commitment

when their salary is low and therefore most of the teachers prefer to private tuition than normal class teaching because tuition gives them an extra income.

4.4.3. Impacts of supportive environment

As discussed before, supportive learning environments have a strong impact positively or negatively on young children's learning and development. Environments that are well-designed allowed children to explore experience their environment and give them a sense of control and allow the children to engage in focused, self-directed learning and play activities (Hohmann and Weikart, 1995; Penn, 2005). However, many preschools' physical environments were not planned thoughtfully in the manners that are able to stimulate children's self-direct and social development. Although most preschools have good natural environments, there were not designed in relation to children age and capacities in a manner that help children to play both independently and with others as they choose. Even if there were disparities in the preschools physical environment and physical spaces in each preschool site, nearly all preschools physical environment are not well-designed to help children develop physical and social interaction through free play activities.

As findings of the study showed classrooms facilities were poor in many preschools and nearly in all preschools indoor space/classroom layouts were not adequate, clean, attractive and airy as well as the classrooms were also crowded in most preschools. As a result, free play activities were not carried out in the classrooms instead teachers let children to play field; let them to play creating their own play activities. Nearly in all preschools, sanitation problems are one of the major challenges because of lack of water, in adequate toile or at least dry latrine. On the other hand the private, religious and government preschools indoor spaces were not convenient for both teachers and children to move freely in the classrooms. As the result free play activities were not carried out in classrooms. However, NGO preschool uses the available spaces appropriately arranging indoor play materials on the children height level shelves. On the contrary, in some preschools outdoor and indoor activities were not facilitated for children with age appropriate play materials. Most preschools settings do not have clean toilet, clean pipe water and available outdoor spaces and facilities. Another observable challenge was that most research preschools settings are encompassed both preschool and primary school

programs in the same school compounds, such a situation has influenced children's learning and development except NGO and one of the religious preschool'C'.

Unavailability of materials and equipment

Unavailable play equipment and materials are another challenge so as to carry out activities that promote children's learning and development (physical, social and cognitive development). In most preschools there were no materials and equipment that facilitated focusing in line with the children's individual and group needs. As observation result have shown, in most preschools the existing outdoor play materials were not served properly for all children because of large class size and unavailability of sufficient play materials to engage each child in the activities that meet his or her interests. Moreover, the existing outdoor play materials are not age appropriate, well maintained and clean. As discussed before, materials and equipment that were available in the preschools playground are not age appropriate for the children to ensure safety and promote children's social and physical development, especially the play materials that were insulted in the grounds of the private schools are inappropriate, made of metal, not repaired and unsafe. In general the existing outdoor equipment and materials in most preschools are not safety, durable, well maintained and not age appropriate. As findings of this study showed nearly all preschools did not accomplish the national minimum requirements of play materials. However, relatively NOG preschool have better planned and organized space and available age appropriate indoor and outdoor play materials. On the contrary government preschool programs do not have any prepared and/or purchased play materials and equipment.

Impacts of large class size

As discussed before, large class size is one of the major challenges for the children's learning and development in each program. Thus, many preschool teachers forced to handle large class size in all preschools. As mentioned earlier, the ministry of education has recommended the maximum number of children not to be more than 40 in a classroom. However, in some preschools it has exceeded twice the mentioned number in a classroom, especially in government primary school-based preschools. This was a great challenge for teachers to provide appropriately ECE for the preschool children because in some preschools teachers handled a crowded classroom alone without

assistant teachers. As a result, preschool education provision focused on teacher-centered rather than play-based learning. Besides, large enrollments in some of the preschools have adversely affected utilization of the indoor and outdoor play materials. For example, during free play time children scrambled for few play materials fight each other but this has negatively affected children social behavior. Moreover, large class size has affected not only utilization of the play materials, but also it has affected teachers' lessons preparation times, child-to-teacher social interaction and time for small group activities, particularly during academic learning activities. Thus, because of large class size, child-to-child and adult-to-child social interactions were low, particularly in the government and private preschool settings. Preschool teachers are justified that a large class size or crowded classrooms have decreased overall curriculum activities that carried out in the crowded classrooms (T2, T8).

On top of that find land also identified as one of the major challenges to minimize large class size building additional classrooms and to provide appropriate learning environment. For example, private and NGO preschools have planned to build additional classrooms to reduce number of children in a classroom, but finding land in the Dilla town is a great challenge, because concerned administrative officials did not respond for the land request by the NGO and private preschool administrators/owners.

4.4.4. Awareness and negative attitudes of the people towards education of CWDs

As it has been discussed under the first major theme lack of the awareness and negative attitude of the people have totally made children with disabilities out of the preschool education program. As interview, observation and document analysis results showed there were no children with observable disabilities in the preschools. Lack of the people awareness and negative attitude towards children with disabilities/special education needs are one of the major challenges children with disabilities to be excluded from ECE. Thus, the major challenges that are hindered CWDs from education opportunity are: lack of parents and community awareness to use their right to enroll their children for the preschool education, lack of teachers and preschool directors/proprietors awareness problems, people negative attitude towards children with disabilities, lack of due attention of zone education department and Woreda education office administrators, lack of government special support and other related factors have negatively affected ECE opportunity for CWDs so that none of the preschool were not created education

opportunity for children with disabilities. Thus, the major challenges/barriers that hindered the preschool education provision for CWDs are awareness and negative attitude of the people (teachers, parents, education administrators, community).

Moreover, lack of people awareness about education of children with disabilities, and fear of parents about social stigma CWDs were discriminated totally from preschool education enrollment and other social services. Thus, zone and Woreda education administrators, preschool directors/proprietors and government administrative officials did not create any types of preschool education program (inclusive) opportunity for children with disabilities/special needs. In addition, zone education department and Woreda education office administrators' interview results showed that they did not have any plan to provide preschool education for CWDs because of due attention problems for the policy documents concerning education of CWDs in their hands. Thus, they overlooked to plan and implement inclusive/integrated preschool education as recommended in the preschool policy framework and other policy documents (e.g. MOE, 2009, 2010 curriculum frameworks). However, Woreda education administrators have responsibility to facilitate inclusive/integrated education opportunity for CWDs but they are reluctant to create education access for children with disabilities and they preferred "silence" not to talk about education opportunity of children with disabilities.

On the other hand, the private and government preschools did not have future plan to admit children with disabilities because of fear of other parents of children without disabilities because parents of children without disabilities have negative attitude towards children with disability and causes of disabilities. As described at the first parts of this chapter, the private preschool directors/proprietors did not have future plan to include children with disabilities in the preschool program. Besides, one of the private preschool directors explained why they did not want to enroll children with disabilities as follows:

we do not have any plan to admit CWDs in our preschool program even if they come...by any means we will not admit those children who are with disabilities[CWDs] because people considered as caused by the evil spirit and communicable diseases. ...maybe we will have room to admit those children who cannot require special supports.

In general, there was lack of awareness and attitude problems, among teachers, parents and education administrators about the education of children with disability. This is because culturally people did not consider as children with disabilities are able to learn.

Such a perception made most teachers not think positively as CWDs can learn and live independent life in society.

4.5. Summary of the Findings

This chapter has presented the findings of the study within the context of existing literature and corresponding to the issues that had been discussed through further researches. Findings are based on qualitative analysis of interviews of education administrators/officials, preschools directors/proprietors, teachers, parent participants of FGDs and observations.

The findings were analyzed corresponding with major themes and subthemes based on research questions and objectives of the study. The first major theme is participants' awareness and understanding of role and values of the preschool education and under this major theme, subthemes were also analyzed and categorized. These were: preschool education access for preschool education, parents-preschool relationship, resources availability and support system and awareness and attitude of the participants' towards education of CWDs. In order to provide preschool education for all children, the participants' perception and understanding is indispensable, especially the regional, zone and Woreda education administrators or officials understanding and commitment could play major roles in accessing preschool education opportunity for all children. Accordingly available information were gathered concerning their perception about the role and values of the ECE and analyzed with regard to the existing trends of the preschool education provision and practices.

The findings of the study also revealed that they have clear understanding concerning the role and values of the ECE. As a result, the numbers of preschools and children enrolments had been increased yearly in the study area and preschool education opportunities were also created in different types of program in the town: Non-governmental (private, NGO & religious), community, and government primary school-based preschool or 'O' level. Findings of this study showed that all participants have understanding about benefits of the preschool education for the children's learning and development. However, preschool directors/proprietors and teachers understanding regarding the current national preschool policy and education of CWDs were low. As findings of the study revealed nearly all participants had awareness and attitude problems

concerning education of the CWDs and the causes of disabilities. As finding of the study showed, in all the preschools there were no children with identified disabilities who had gotten preschool education opportunity, except a girl who was 12 years old with moderately mental retardation in one of the private preschools (B).

In addition, finding of the study demonstrated that most preschools have strong relationships with parents. Preschool teachers and directors believed that parent-preschool close relationship had great positive impacts on the children learning and development. Those parents who have sent their children to preschool are typically the ones who have awareness of ECE and involved in children education and school performances. Thus, most parents usually visited preschools and made follow up to their children's education progresses and communicate with teachers, especially parents who have supported their children's do their home works and provide learning materials have effective relationships to the teachers. However, parent's level of involvement depends on type of the preschool programs. For example, private preschools have close relationships with parents and have meetings with parents in each quarter of academic year so as to discuss on the preschool issues and to report children's education progress. On the contrary parent-teacher relationships were weak in the government primary-based preschools even if parents have interested in their children obtaining opportunity for the school readiness skills. Teachers who have teaching in these schools are not interested in making relationships with parents.

The second section has been discussed with regard to three major themes and subthemes. The three major themes and subthemes under each major theme have been discussed in this chapter. These major themes and subthemes are mentioned as follows: (1) appropriateness of the curricula practiced in preschools, appropriateness for children holistic learning and development, participants believe children learn to their holistic development, parents believe/demand their children learn more in preschool); (2) participant's awareness and appropriateness of curricula preschools practiced (participant's awareness of kinds of curricula preschools use), participant's knowledge about the sources of the curricula in use, linkage of curriculum preschools use to the national curriculum guide, why preschools became resistant to implement the new

curriculum), and (3) instructional approaches/strategies(teacher-centred/teacher-directed, lecture method, play-based/child-centred).

Finding of the study revealed that the curricula preschools practiced were not age appropriate, not well organized and adapted according to the children age and schools context so that each preschool used different curriculum depending on their needs and preschool programs. Many preschools used both academic and non-academic curricula so that somehow the curricula preschools practiced addressed children holistic learning and development. However, both teachers and parents believed that children learn more of academic areas. So nearly in all preschools academic areas based curricula have been given more emphases, and parents also demanded their children learn more of academic areas curricula and they require their children learn more of language, literacy, and math, especially reading, writing and arithmetic were prioritized because parents wish their children to be competent in further academic areas.

Moreover, the curricula that were practiced in the preschools were inappropriate. The major sources of their curricula were from markets that were prepared based on the other countries experiences such as US, UK, India and Kenya. Even if the preschools used such curricula, most teachers and some administrators did not know the sources of the curricula that they were using in the preschools. Besides, these curricula do not have linkage to the national and regional new play-based curriculum and materials. However, there is an integrated play-based curriculum and materials in Woreda and in some preschool bookstores. These curricula and materials were not being implemented properly in preschools due to teachers' lack of competence, traditionally held beliefs of parents and teachers about subject based teaching-learning practices, and instructional media being Amharic rather than English. Most preschools used teachers-centered instructional approaches and lecture method during academic areas teaching-learning process but a few preschools used both teacher-centered academic areas and play-based/child-centered teaching-learning approaches, like NGO preschool. In addition, in the private, religious and government preschools large group/the whole group teaching-learning activities were practiced because of large class size. Indeed, this instructional approach was effective in the classrooms with large class size, especially during language and literacy (reading) instructional approach as it has discussed earlier in this chapter.

Furthermore, the third section that has been discussed in this chapter was the conduciveness of the existing preschools physical environment and facilities in relation to children's holistic learning and development as well as how the ECE provision or curriculum implementation have been impacted by the physical learning environments and facilities were discussed. Accordingly the major theme and subthemes that were emerged from data analysis were discussed in this chapter. Hence, under the major theme of supportive learning environment, subthemes have been discussed. These are: outdoor physical environment and facilities, outdoor play materials and equipment, sanitation and health, and classroom physical environment and facilities. Finding of the observations and interviews revealed that most of the preschools natural physical environments are interesting but they were not designed and organized in the ways that children are able to explore experience and investigate according to their capacity, needs and interests. Most preschools outdoor physical learning environment design did not fulfill the recommended national preschool physical environment standards. Hence, most preschools 'outdoor physical environments are not barrier free for children to play and move freely.

Moreover, most demonstrated and available outdoor play materials and equipment in the preschools were not age appropriate, well maintained, safe, clean, attractive, and accessible in order to support children's learning and development. In most preschools play materials that were installed over the ground seemed as if only to show as they accomplished the recommended national preschool outdoor play materials minimum requirements even if the materials were not properly functioning and the spaces were not safety so far. However, some preschools even did not have any outdoor play materials. For these reasons, most children have preferred to play creating their own traditional plays in the play field. The older children prefer to play football which are made of old socks and small rubber balls in the field and girls prefer to play skipping rope being in group in nearly in all preschools.

What is more, the preschool classrooms were not divided into different learning centers/corners, and were not equipped with age appropriate play materials in the ways that help children to play with and manipulate them because of large class size and small classrooms so that in most preschools free play activities were not carried out in their

classrooms. Thus, as observation result revealed nearly in all types of preschool programs there were no indoor play materials, available teaching materials and shelves for both children and teachers to keep important materials. Besides, most preschools have barriers regarding classroom safety and facilities in line with large class size, spaces, play materials, and teaching materials. However, the classroom environment facilities were better in NGO preschool to support children to be engaged actively in creative play activities with available play materials which were organized on the shelves at the child height level. The large numbers of children in a classroom/large class size is common problem but it considered as a benefit for cost minimization in private and religious preschools, while in government preschools it was considered as happened because of lack of trained teachers and extra classrooms , and the enrolment as the child 'right' for education. However, they managed by using rows of desks seating arrangements in all preschools except two preschools. The classrooms which were arranged in the rows of desks seating arrangements were serving children in a better way for the academic areas learning and helped to manage classroom discipline when compared to seating at flexible chairs and tables in the large class size because teachers always sit or stand in front of the children when they perform activities and teacher could make series eye contacts.

On the other hand sanitation and health problems were serious issue in most preschools. Because of hot weather condition and shortage of water supply children often affected by malaria and other water borne diseases. Due to health problem absenteeism was common challenge for some children nearly in all preschools. Thus, health and sanitation problems have directly influenced children's preschool attendance. Besides, the shortage of water supply was the main problem for the lack of toilets sanitation and hygiene in preschools. The existing dry latrines in most preschool were not appropriate, clean and safety for both children and teachers. Although there were obvious health and sanitation problems in the preschools, there were no first aid providing programs, first aid rooms and medical consultants nearly in all of the preschools except one of the preschools (NGO).

Furthermore, there were challenges in the provision of ECE for preschool children or in the preschool curriculum implementation that were discussed according to the identified/emerged major theme (challenges in the preschool education provision/in

preschool curriculum implementation) in this chapter and subthemes were: lack of teachers' competence and motivation/the lowest payment; lack of facilitated physical learning environment, lack of materials and equipment, large class size; lack of awareness and negative attitude of parents, teachers and community towards education of CWDs/ special needs and causes of disabilities and lack of the region, zone and Woreda education administrators due attention to create preschool education opportunity(inclusive education program) for CWDs also were investigated as the challenges in the preschool education provision or in preschool curriculum implementation. As a result, children with disabilities totally discriminated from the preschool education opportunities.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. 1. Discussions

The major purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate early childhood education provision for preschool children and to explore appropriateness of the curriculum preschools use in line with children learning and development, and the most pressing challenges/barriers in curriculum implementation in Dilla town with emphasis to the analysis of education administrators, parents, preschool directors and teachers perception and understanding of role and values of preschool education. Other objectives were to identify appropriateness of the curricula used in preschools, supportive learning environment and facilities to support children's learning and development, challenges for preschool curriculum implementation or preschool education provision in line with children's learning and development. Therefore, the purpose of discussion is to highlight the remarkable findings from chapter four and it places them in a context with other research reviewed in chapter two and findings documented in the literature.

Before moving into detailed interpretation of the results, it is important to reconsider the research question posed in this study. These are: The following research questions were posed for this study: (1) How are the role and values of preschool education understood and perceived by the administrators, teachers and parents? And what beliefs do participants hold regarding education of children with disabilities/special needs? (2) What do participants think children's to learn for their holistic learning and development? (3) What types of curriculum are the preschools using and how is it implemented? (4) What environment is required for children learning and development? (5) How preschool physical environment and facilities are conducive to support children's learning and development? (6) What are the challenges/barriers for children's learning and development?

5.1.1. Participants' perception on roles and values of preschool education

The finding from the participants' interviews indicated that the roles and values of preschool education are perceived and understood in relation to children's holistic learning and development. For example, concerning the role and values of ECE mainly the following major points were replied by the participants as follows:

- foundation for the children's learning and development

- could be bases for children's holistic/all-round development
- helps to children learn school manner and behavior/code of conduct before school
- promote children's further education
- help to develop social interaction/child- to- child, child- to- adult
- minimize dropouts and repetition rates
- help children for lifelong learning and development

Each participant has reflected her/his views regarding the role and values of preschool education in relation to children learning and development and they believed that preschool education could support children to develop positive social behavior and independent learning experience at home and school. At the same time nearly all interview participants considered ECE as a valuable start for the children lifelong learning and development optimized. Various studies also confirmed that early years of learning experiences can have a long-lasting implication for children's future life (Ejeh, 2006; Woodhead, 2009; UNESCO, 2008).

Analysis of the data from participants' interviews showed that they seemed to have an understanding for the values of ECE for preschool children. The participants' positive perception and understanding towards the roles and values of ECE contribute a lot in the process of ECE provision and for creating quality preschool education for all. As interview finding of the education administrator participants' revealed that accessing preschool education for all children is one of the agendas in administrative town/Warda education office to reduce drop-outs, grade repetition, and to bring quality in education sector. In support of this finding the studies confirmed that ECE can improve school readiness; make enrolment in the first grade more likely and reduce delayed enrolment, drop-out and grade repetition as well as it increases completion and academic achievement (OECD, 2015; UNESCO, 2008; Rogoff, 2003; Kamerman, 2007). In fact preschool education plays a significant role not only in the developmental domains but also play a great role in the children further academic achievement; increase quality in education process.

The research results realized that children who have begun early education before entering school will have accelerated in school and many of the fundamental values of tomorrow's society are being formed in early childhood context today (Crim, Hawkin,

Thornton, Rosoff, Copley & Thomas, 2008; Ejie, 2006). Similarly another study findings also confirmed that children who have participated in preschool programs tend to be socially and emotionally more competent, and successful in later school, and show better verbal, intellectual and physical development than children who are not enrolled in preschool education program (American Educational Research Association, 2005; Currie & Thomas, 1995). Unlikely the regional education bureau expert felt that quality preschool education enables children to be more capable and confident get ready for primary school education because early childhood education has multi-dimensional roles with a focus on the holistic development of children. Consequently, now preschool education opportunities are increased inviting interested private investors, NGO and religious organizations, as well as providing “O” classes in government primary schools. However, access of preschool education for children of parents with low socio-economic background still low because parents could not send their children to the private preschools charging education fee in private preschools.

Access of preschool education

What beliefs do participants hold regarding education of children with disabilities/special needs? This question was forwarded for the interview participants and they held different views concerning CWDs. Findings from observation and participants’ interviews confirmed that access for preschool education has been increased yearly. However, that preschool education was not accessible for children with disabilities because of the lack of awareness and negative attitude of the people towards the cause of the disabilities and education of children with disabilities. As the results, CWDs did not get opportunity for preschool education. The survey study that was carried out in Ethiopia confirmed that the existing early childhood education programs are not open door for children with disabilities (Tirussew, Teka, Belay, Demeke, 2009).

As stated in national policies, all children including children with disabilities have ‘rights’ to learn in an inclusive regular classes according to their need, interest and capacity (MOE, 1994) and ECE policy framework (MOE, 2010). However, children with disabilities have been discriminated from education program and other social services in the research preschools because of negative attitude and lack of awareness the stakeholders (parents, community, teachers and preschool administrators) held and being

education official reluctant to create access of education opportunities for CWDs. As interviews and observation results revealed none of the research preschools had created ECE opportunity (inclusive education) for children with disabilities/special needs.

Regarding the negative attitude of the people towards children with disabilities the research result argued how negative attitude, myths and stereotypes continue to create prejudice toward people with disabilities (Shapiro, 2000) and these prejudices are reflected in negative attitudes and behavior, which can hinder access for the participation of children with disabilities in social and educational settings (White, Jackson, & Gordon, 2006; Rusch, Wilson, Hughes, & Heal, 1995). In general children with disabilities were excluded from preschool education opportunity due to negative attitudes of people's towards education of children with disabilities.

Parent-preschool relationship: parent-preschool relationship depends on the types of the preschool programs (private, religious, community, NOG and government)', parents socio-economic status and believes. In most cases preschool directors and teachers play a major role for the establishment of strong or weak parent-preschool relationship. Most preschools had preplan to meet with parents in each quarter of the year. As interview participants result revealed parent-preschool relationships played a great role in the children's learning activities and enhanced children's desirable behavior at home and in the preschool. Many studies confirmed that successful early childhood programs can only be established and best realized through parent-preschool positive relationships (Olsen, 2010).As pointed out by Bronfenbrenner & Ceci (1994) parent involvement bridges the home and school settings within an ecological framework. The fact that the home and school contexts that are characterized as independent microsystems and parent involvement is conceptualized as a mesosystems, which is made up of interactions between key microsystems. Although each setting can independently influence a child, the home and school contexts together interact to offer a unique influence on children learning and development. However, parents who were participated in petty businesses had weak relationship to the preschools, particularly in private preschools; however, numbers of such parents were few because most children who are learning in private preschools come from parents of middle economic level. As research study revealed parent involvement also determined by the parents' values and attitudes

they hold for their children education (Urdang, 2008; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, and Egeland, 2004). Hence, parents may enhance learning activities directly and indirectly promoting children's motivation and challenging learning activities. Similar studies that carried out on parent-child relationships revealed that positive parent-child relationships at early years are critical so as to promote appropriate skills development, self-sufficiency and social skills (Urdang, 2008; UNESCO, 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

The private preschool interview and observation results also showed that most parents have played significant role in their children learning and development enhancing their children's self-regulation, social skills at home and visiting preschools to evaluate activities what are performed in the preschools. Besides, most preschools also have developed positive relationships with parents through different means of communication such as through quarterly meeting and calling parents when it was necessary. On the other hand teachers daily made positive relationships with parents/caregivers through indirect and direct means of communications offering homework for their children, and in turn parents check their children's progresses and by giving comments and put signs on their children's' exercise books on the provided spaces or coming to school and discussing face to face with teachers because most of the parents are aware of such kinds of interactions as enhanced their children learning and development. The study that was carried out on parent involvement confirmed that parent-preschool relationship and parents involvement in their children education commonly include the quality and frequency of communication with teachers to enhance school functions, and children learning and developmental activities (Shankoff & Phillips, 2000; Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2004). Parents play a great role for the children's development and learning depending on the nature of the parent's experiences and parents' relationship with their children. The result of this study showed that most parents who have sent their children to preschools have made strong relationships with preschools because they made close follow up concerning their children's academic and behavioral progresses; while few parents did not have willingness to work cooperatively with teachers to share their children responsibilities. The studies report also show that parents who are involved in their children's schooling exhibit self-confidence in their parenting and increase more knowledge of child development (Urdang, 2000; Epstein, 2001).

Findings of this study indicated that in the private preschools parents have mutual understandings about preschool education and work collaboratively with preschools to support their children's progress and school activities. Consequently children had gained psychological and social benefits from parent-teacher positive relationships. In addition, private preschools have meeting with parents in each quarter of academic year so as to discuss on the preschool performances and to provide report concerning the children progresses and to strengthen parent-preschool relationships. Furthermore, education proprietors/administrators' interview participants reported that teacher-parent relationships had strengthened children's academic learning and social developments because of positive teacher-parents relationships, parents also provide supportive learning materials for children at home and support their children do their 'homework. So it was used as one of the good means of communication that create strong relationships between teachers and parents. It is also pointed out by Epstein (2001); Miller (1996), and Morrison (1995) that children who are supported by their parents at home could perform better in school. Moreover, the study reports showed that parents who have participated in school activities, have children who are more attentive in their efforts to learn and are better behaved in school and at home. When nurturing parent-teacher relationships, "parents maintain collaboration with the preschool, the children, and the teachers are usually more comfortable with their roles and the roles being played" (Miller, 1996, p. 352). It was also confirmed by the teacher interview participants that teacher-parent relationships had contributed children to develop confidence in academic learning activities and social interaction with their peers and adults so that most children who were supported at home, especially in language and literacy skills areas are academically high achievers later in school.

Moreover, teachers and directors/proprietors from NGO and religious preschools pointed out that parent-teacher relationship encouraged children to develop positive attitude towards learning new things in school and at home environments. Bredekamp & Copple, (1997), and Olsen (2010) have also stressed the importance of parent involvement and parent-teacher communication for the success full learning and development. Besides, teachers' interview respondents reported that parent-teacher relationships had been increased time to time because parents' understanding increased

concerning the benefits values of ECE for their children learning and development even though some working parents were reluctant to come and visit their children in the preschools. However, they are participated in the annual or quarterly meeting that preplanned to discuss with parents concerning the children's education performances and school progress reports. Findings of the study revealed that some parents who have sent their children to religious preschool are not keen to share their children responsibility instead they blame the preschool when they child failed to compete like other children.

In general now parents have awareness concerning preschool education, and many children have got opportunity to start at expected age depending on the distant of preschools found and family socio-economic background. Researchers claimed that when parent awareness and involvement in their children's early education increased, parents' understanding also increased (Epstein, 2001;Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, &Fendrich, 1999), children's education outcomes would also be improved.

It is also observed that parent-preschool relationship in many preschools have fostered preschools performance and children's engagement in the learning activities. For example, in private preschool numbers of children are highly increased yearly because children who are learning in private preschools are academically high achievers in primary and high schools so that parents who can afford education fee prefer to enroll their children in the private preschools. A research study that carried out in ECE also confirmed that parents' involvement in child education associated with their children academic achievement in elementary and high school, lower high school dropout rates (Miedel& Reynolds, 1999).

As discussed in chapter four parent involvements typically corresponding to the parents' behaviors in home and contribution in school settings to support their children's educational progress so that parents are aware of a preschool education benefits and they have involved in providing resources and support their children at home. As noted by many researchers, parent involvement commonly includes the frequency of communication with teachers and participation in school functions and children learning and developmental activities (Dearing, kreider, Simpkins, and Weiss, 2006; Machen, Wilson, &Notar, 2004). Parent involvement also characterizes parents' values and attitudes regarding education and the aspirations they hold for their children. Although

values and attitudes may not directly influence children learning outcomes, they may enhance learning outcome directly and indirectly promoting children's motivation and challenging learning activities.

5.1.2. Thinking on learning and development

As preschool policy framework(MOE, 2010) and national curriculum guide (MOE, 2010; 2009) give particular emphasis play-based preschool curriculum to be implemented to promote children in all aspects of socio-emotional, physical and cognitive development, through collaboration of parents, community and preschools creating supportive learning environment in preschool and at home. As pointed out by Vygotsky (1978) zone of proximal development supports idea that children learn through investigating new concepts with planned supports of adult. He also stated that “what the child is able to do in collaboration today; he will be able to do independently tomorrow” (p. 211). This means that children can learn things first in a supportive context and then later independently in a variety of circumstances without adults’ supports. Moreover, the national preschool education curriculum framework and other related studies have placed a specific emphasis on play-based learning that promotes children learn best through well planned play activities which are able to motivate, stimulate and provide opportunities for children to create social groups, solve problems, engage in critical thinking and develop positive dispositions towards learning so as to promote “holistic” development of the child (MOE, 2010; MOE, 2009; UNESCO,2004; NAEYC, 2003).

Moreover, Piaget (1962) reinforced play as a significant activity for the development of children’s’ cognitive, social, problem-solving, critical thinking, and imagination. As observation finding of this study showed, however, preschools allotted more time for the academic areas due to the traditionally teachers’ developed teaching experiences and parents’ expectation as well as shortage of teaching materials. Of course, traditionally academic focused learning areas are considered as vital learning approach in order to be children academically competent in school.

Besides, all private preschools directors reported that their preschool being private preschool, they were obliged to give more emphasis for academic areas, particularly the strength and weakness of a preschool are evaluated by the parents based on the their children’s academic achievements. Nevertheless, NGO preschool equally gives emphasis

for both academic and play-based learning because the preschool have adequate learning environment and equipment which help children to be engaged in creative play activities. As pointed out by White & Coleman (2000) and Novak(1996) stimulating learning environment the children's development can be seen in the progressive changes in the nature of interaction between the learners and their environment (Bijou & Ribes, 1996). Furthermore, the study result showed that most director/proprietor and teacher participants believed at equally importance of both academic area focused and play-based curricula to be implemented in the preschools. However, in many preschools more considerations were given for the academic areas (reading, writing and math) because of preschool administrators/proprietors, teachers and parents' traditionally accepted trends of competency based curricula usage. The research study confirmed appropriateness of the curriculum implementation could be influenced by the teachers and parents' beliefs (Hedge & Cassidy, 2009). However, preschool curriculum should focus on children' holistic development such as the cognitive, emotional, intellectual, physical, mental, moral, spiritual, psychological and social foundation upon which children's futures are built through play-based learning (UNESCO, 2004; UNECEF, 2003; NAEYC, 2003).

Preschools and parents demanded to children learn more of academic areas, particularly English language and literacy. This means that parents wish their children to be smart and competent enough in academic areas learning like English (reading, writing, and arithmetic) at their further education. So more of academic focused learning activities negatively influence children's learning and development but for preschool children both academic and non-academic curriculum activities are equally important for the children holistic learning and development. For example, NGO preschool properly implemented Montessori curriculum model of teaching approach with the help of age appropriate learning materials in adequate learning environment.

As described earlier participants justified one of the factors why parents demanded to children learn more of language and literacy, it is because that today many students faced challenges of English reading and writing. As a result, students forced for dropping out repetition because of communication problem, and English being instructional media starting from grade five in SNNPR.

5. 1.3.Types of curricula and the implementation

In this part discussion attempts to realize and explain findings related to curricula that are used in the preschools and appropriateness for preschool children in private religious, government and NGO. Appropriate and well planned ECE curriculum focused on developmental outcomes in the area of cognitive, social and emotional milestones. However, as demonstrated this studies the “preschools “used various types of curricula that are not age appropriate curriculum. However, as the study and literature demonstrated an age appropriate preschool curriculum expected to be play based, integrated, flexible, and contextual so as to address children’s developmental domains (Frede & Ackerman, 2007; Manning, 2005; Baader, 2004).

As observed, however, many research preschools were mainly focused on academic subject areas such as literacy, language and math which were carried out in the confined classrooms using teacher-centered teaching-learning strategies. As observation results showed, even if most preschools used both academic and non-academic curricula, nearly all of them gave more emphasis for English literacy, language and arithmetic (simple mathematical operation). Such curricula were common in many preschools teaching-learning process, especially in community preschools more emphasis was given for academic curriculum activities and less emphasis for non-academic activities.

The study results of interviews and observation results showed most preschool curricula were not age appropriate because most education administrators and teachers have low understanding about the curricula used in the preschools. As a result, different kinds of curricula were used in the preschools. Some preschools are used developing their own curriculum materials, whereas others used borrowed curricula from foreign countries, others also used textbooks contents purchased from markets which were published by the different authors. Thus, lack of the common curriculum led the preschools to use inappropriate and various curricula that were beyond their children capacities. Although some preschools prepared their own curriculum, it was not age appropriate and made children to be disappointed to learn, particularly children in community school were faced such kind of problem. As the observation results showed the materials which used in the community preschool were not prepared by the preschool education professional or experienced preschool teachers. Moreover, age of the children would not be taken into consideration when materials were prepared, and the contents of

the curriculum materials/textbooks were too broad and not age appropriate. As the result, most children were not interested and tedious to follow the academic activities that were imposed by the teachers. Besides, the curriculum materials, both prepared in preschools and purchased from markets are not age appropriate because they were not developed in line with national or regional preschool education 'philosophy' and objectives.

On the other hand literature review has shown that there is a new play-based integrated preschool curriculum that was developed and organized by the regional education bureau. However, this play-based curriculum was failed because it was not implemented practically in the preschools because preschool administrators and teachers do not aware of this curriculum and they did not consider the new integrated curriculum as appropriate for the children's learning and development.

As a result, all research preschools used different kinds of curricula from various sources such as USA, and UK, grade one syllabus and unspecific curricula that were not age appropriate, but most preschools directors and nearly all teachers were not aware of the sources of the curricula that their preschools used because the curriculum materials purchased from markets. In general finding of the study revealed that curricula practiced in preschools do not have linkage to the new national and regional preschool curriculum guide.

As the study findings showed, in all preschools mainly teacher-centered and lecture methods were employed; however, the ECE policy education and strategies (MOE, 2010) stated that:

The preschool education program should employed child-centered approach and play will be used as the main means of enhancing the child's learning experiences...in order to promote the children's holistic learning and development including culturally relevant, developmentally appropriate and inclusive indoor and outdoor materials (p. 21-22).

There was also mismatched between the new preschool child-centered curriculum (MOE, 2010; 2009) and curricula that had practically been employed in the preschools because of many factors. The studies that was carried out on preschool education and practices realized that many times mismatch observed between expected practices of preschool education and practices that were actually being implemented in the preschools due to lack of teachers competence and support from their district education administrators, and community as well (Wall, Litjens, &Taguma, 2015; Wien, 2004). As

this study result revealed similar problems were observed and “preschools” met such challenges. As a result, teacher-centered teaching approach has negative influenced children’s learning and development. The literatures have clarified that teachers’ competence could play a central role in understanding how children learn and develop to implement child-centered learning approach for the children’s learning and development (Hur, Jeon & Buettner, 2015; Wall, Litjens, & Taguma, 2015; MOE, 2010). Thus, competent teachers develop positive interactions with children, plan and provide age appropriate instructional practices, create conducive classroom environment that inspires children’s learning and developmental activities.

According to constructivist view, learning is considered as an active process of constructing rather than receiving knowledge, and teaching is also considered as a process of supporting learners to construct ideas rather than delivering knowledge. Learning and development occur when young children interact with the environment and people around them (Pham, 2011, Bigge & Shermis, 2004). Such approach is also supported by the study that was conducted on, specifically at the preschool level on teachers’ instructional strategies that teachers who held more progressive and child-centered curriculum activities tend to share more positive social/emotional experiences with children, as compared to teachers that use more traditional, teacher-centered curricula (Driscoll & Pianta, 2010). Similarly other researchers noted that when children learn independently through play, individual differences have to take into consideration and adults should identify whether the activities that are performed appropriate for the children’s age and built on previously taught concepts or not (Derry, 2013; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Further studies also reported that child-centered learning approach promote children’s independent learning, exploration, and develop competence in language and problem-solving than their peers learning in teacher-centered classroom settings (Derry, 2013; Stipek & Byler, 1997). As findings of the study revealed teacher-centered teaching strategy was the most influential approach in the preschools. As claimed by UNESCO (2012) in developing countries preschool, teaching approach is still largely academic and teacher-centered rather than play-based and exploratory.

As observed teaching approaches in the preschools were almost similar to primary school and traditionally teachers follow teacher-centered instructional approaches. As study that was carried out by Derebssa (2006) on tension between traditional and modern teaching-learning approaches in Ethiopian primary schools realized that traditional lecture methods, in which teachers talk and students listen dominate of teaching and learning, and obstacle for the implementation of active learning. Active learning might be termed as child-centered learning in preschool; however, the important thing here is that traditionally teachers give more emphasis for teacher-centered instructional approaches similarly in the preschools.

As observed mostly songs used integrating to the teacher-centered academic areas learning activities in the classroom. It is also common in all types of preschools programs and children also highly motivated for singing. The private, religious and community preschools teachers usually let children sang songs at the beginning of the lesson, during transition time and at the end of lesson/instructional activities; children are also eager to sing songs rather than learning academic areas for a long time. Nevertheless, as classroom observations result confirmed children had adapted learning sitting for a long time in the classroom following teacher-centered instruction because in each interval of activities and transition time teachers were let children to sing songs in order to motivate children and to handle children for a long time in a classroom.

On the other hand in the government primary school-based preschools ('O' level) lecture method and asking and answering instructional strategies were the main instructional approaches in the classroom. In contrast in the NGO preschool academic subject areas activities were followed by the teacher-directed instructional approach supporting by the hand-on learning materials/teaching aides. Many research studies also support that teachers who hold more child-centered beliefs make preschool classrooms more interesting and allow children to construct their own knowledge instead of emphasizing on teacher-centered learning (Garrett, 2008' Pianta, 2016; Stipek, 2016; Stipek &Byler, 1997).

Furthermore, large group/the whole group learning activities were also more influential strategy in the private, religious, community and government primary school-based preschools so as to engage children in the curriculum activities, especially in

academic subject areas like reading and math activities. Thus, as it has been discussed in chapter four, the whole group learning approach was common in teacher-centered and lecture method of the instructional approaches. For example, regarding the importance of the whole/large grouping learning activities a teacher with a long year teaching experiences in different preschools explained that the “whole group” practices are common and preferable strategies in the classroom with a large class size; especially it was effective method for language skills development.

5. 1.4.Environment for learning and development

The indoor and outdoor physical learning environments and facilities of the research preschools were different depending on the types of preschool programs and availability of resources. In most research preschools outdoor activities were mainly carried out in the natural environment/play field; in some preschools outdoor activities in the built environments. Most preschools’ natural environments seemed interesting; however, they are not designed and organized according to the children ages. As White, (2000); Marion (1999) the children’s learning and development could be influenced by the inappropriate physical learning environment, for instance, shortage of infrastructure and small space. Of course, children require rich and stimulating learning environments so as to uphold effective social, physical and cognitive development. The studies that were carried out on preschool learning environment demonstrated that properly designed supportive preschool physical environment could promote children’s social interactions, self-esteem and sense of confidence (Curtis, 2001; Ryan and Adams, 1995 as cited in White, 2000). Findings of this study revealed most play activities were taken place outside the classroom because physical play activities did not carry in the classroom so that children preferred playing freely in the natural playground. The researches that were carried out on natural play environment justified that the natural play environments seemed to be better for children’s cognitive and physical development than built play areas. For example, children who play in natural areas engaged in more physically demanding play activities when compared to traditional built environments (Moore & Sugiyama, 2007; Fjortoft, 2004; Jackman, 2001; Elliott, 2006; Marion, 1999). Regarding the importance of the natural environment learning and development Bodrova & Leong (2007) explained that preschool natural environment helps young children to language skills by interacting with others and in the

social context. As observed; however, due to inappropriate physical learning environment, in most research preschools child-to-child social interaction and psychomotor movements were strongly influenced, particularly in private and community preschools because of small outdoor spaces and large class size. Hence, the preschools physical environments were not well-designed and facilitated did not allow children to explore, experience and engaged in self-directed play activities and social interaction even though preschools natural environment seemed attractive. However, numerous studies that have carried out on physical environment argued that well-designed and facilitated physical environment foster children to explore and experience world round them, and help build strong relationships with adults and peers because physical environment and children's development of cognitive and social competency have direct relationships (Lawrenc, 2012; Berris, & Miller, 2011; Moore 2002).

Many researchers emphasized that play is a part of real life and is a very important learning process for children learning and developments. Whether a child has a certain intention or not; whether the play is done on a regular basis or not in any circumstance when play takes place in voluntarily and willingly in physical learning environment (Tarman, 2011; Maxwell, 2007; Jackman, 2001). However, due to limited play materials and equipment children were playing creating their own play activities in preschools outdoor natural environment even if the outdoor physical environment was not barrier free, sometimes they me injuries when they play running. As pointed out by Acar, (2014) and Jackman (2001) "outdoor time play activities require adults who are playful, have sharp senses and quick reactions, and who will closely observe children" in the playground/field (p. 36-37). These show that outdoor activities requires sensitive and a significant teachers' responsibility, enthusiasm, and scaffolding children in order to develop self-confidence, self-regulation and social interaction. As observed by the researcher, in many preschools, teachers made close follow up when children play in the field because outdoor play materials and equipment that were existed in the preschools are not equally served children in order to fulfill individual child interests and needs.

Furthermore, the observation results of this study showed that most research preschools have wide outdoor physical environment without playful traditional or contemporary built play materials. Thus, the preschools had common types of traditionally well-known outdated outdoor play materials and equipment that are required as prerequisites to have in

preschools. However, the existing materials and equipment in most preschools were not adequate, not well maintained and inaccessible for children to use. These play materials and equipment that were existed in most preschools could not fulfill even the minimum requirements of the national outdoor play materials and equipment standard in both quality and quantity. As mentioned in the national preschool education program standard (2009) all preschools expected to have outdoor and indoor play materials in a preschool at least to accomplish the minimum national requirements to be licensed as a preschool. However, the outdoor play materials and equipment that were demonstrated in the preschools were not age appropriate, well maintained and safe for preschool children. As Frost, Wortham, & Reifel (2005) stated all materials and equipment existing in the playground should be repaired, maintained and age appropriate to ensure children's learning and developmental needs. However, as observed children during outdoor play time showed low interest to play with such unsaved play materials which were installed on the ground, instead they preferred to play creating their own play activities being in group and pair. It is possible to say that this was happen because of two observable problems first one is that the number of play materials were not match with the existing number of children, and naturally children not interested to use the same thing repeatedly and the materials were not attractive and well maintained.

The studies that were carried out on outdoor play materials in the early 20th century on children's playgrounds argued that the materials that were equipped with standardized, structured and often installed over the ground, currently outdated (Acar, 2014; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2005; Rothenberg, and Beasley, 1974), still these play materials are functioning in the research preschools. However, contemporary playgrounds included multi-purpose and linked structures that provided various means for entry and exit, and junk playgrounds incorporated various types of moveable materials and tools for children to use in constructing their own play structures, rather than having conventional play equipment. The findings of this study confirmed that most preschools have such outdoor outdated play materials that were not well maintained, safe, and clean and are not developmentally appropriate. As the result, when children use outdoor play materials and equipment, some children often had met injuries.

On the other hand most preschools outdoor were not facilitated properly for children free movement in line with the healthy and developmental needs of the preschool children even those preschools which have wide school compound, have low outdoor physical facilities, safety and hygiene problems. Moreover, nearly all the research preschools have sanitation and hygiene problems in relation to the toilet sanitation and scarcity of water, except a preschool (NGO). However, sanitation is crucial issue and prerequisite for the children's healthy development and learning because health problem could directly affect children's learning and development. Thus, sanitation problem was serious issue in most preschools attendance and due to health problem children's absenteeism was common nearly in all preschools the research area being lowland. The numerous research reports also confirmed that inadequacy of the health will greatly influence the ways how children attended in the learning process because there are complex and interdependent relationships between children education and health (Myers and Robinson, 2007; Landry, 2005; Hertzman, 2003; UNESCO, 2002). As pointed out by (Landry, 2005) the existing relationships between education and health has implications across development...with early childhood education setting that demonstrates directions for the "life trajectory path of how education and health will interface for a given individual" (p.62), and healthy children learn more effectively than less healthy children, and children who do well in school could be successful in education. Findings of this study revealed in some preschools health problem is serious issue and caused for the children absenteeism. Besides, in the preschools there were no first aid provision program, first aid rooms and medical consultants except NGO preschool. When children meet health problem, preschools send children back to their home calling parents/caregivers instead of taking to clinic. However, as the research studies justified meeting the developmental needs of young children is as much about building a strong foundation for lifelong physical and mental health as it is about enhancing readiness to succeed in school (Shonkoff, Boyce & McEwen, 2009; Hertzman & Power; 2003 Krieger, 2001;), working to overcome health problems since at early age is beyond the provision of medical services and very important vehicle for reducing the social burdens, human capacity impairment in the adult years. It was apparently pointed out by the preschool teachers that most preschools did not pay important attention for

sanitation and hygiene facilities, for example, most research preschools had inadequate toilet facilities and scarcity of water supply

An attractive classroom environment is significant so as to facilitate children's learning and social development. Safe and suitable classroom physical facilities profoundly contribute children to develop rich experiences in the learning process. As this study results demonstrated most preschools' classrooms physical environment and facilities were poor, and there were no available play materials, displays and other age appropriate play materials in the corners of the classrooms. As argued out by Darling-Hammond (2003) classroom facilities have positive and negative impacts on children learning, when the classroom facilities is improved, learning outcomes is also improved. Thus, interesting classrooms facilities, available spaces and place, convenient seating arrangement, comfortable and flexible classrooms can positively influence education provision (Matthews & Lippman, 2016; Berris& Miller, 2011). As observed; however, in most preschools classrooms 'physical environment, classroom size, layout, furniture, lighting, seating arrangement were not convenient for the children's learning and development. Furthermore, child-to-child and adult- to-child social interactions were low because of large class size. In order to manage classroom discipline usually a teacher hold stick in her hand either to point activities on the chalkboard or to pound children. Such conditions influenced teacher-child relationship in most preschools.

5.1.5. Barriers for children learning and development

Early childhood education is so crucial in order to lay foundation for children lifelong learning and development in physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional domains (UNESCO, 2010; Carneiro and Heckman, 2003; MOE, 2010). However, the finding of the study shows that preschools have various challenges in terms of resources that are negatively influenced in most preschools education provision. That is, most preschools have faced various challenges so as to uphold children's holistic learning and development. Finding from observations and post observation interviews of teachers and directors also revealed that preschools had encountered various challenges/barriers to implement the preschool curriculum in line with children's holistic learning and development. Most identified challenges were: teachers' previous held teaching experience, lack of competence, lack of motivation/lowest payment, lack of facilitated

physical learning environment, lack of materials and equipment, large class size, finding land to build additional classrooms, lack of stakeholder (parents, teachers and the community) awareness and negative attitude towards education opportunity for CWDs/ special needs: lack of administration due attention and lack of special support of government were investigated and analyzed as the major challenges in the preschool education provision and for the new curriculum implementation problems. The study that was carried out in Kenya on barriers that hinder the implementation ECE in line with children learning and development confirmed that included lack of enough trained teachers, high child-teacher ratio, insufficient learning resources, insufficient classrooms and furniture appropriate for preschool children, sharing playground with primary children (Ayaga, 2018).

As observation results of this study revealed one of the major challenges to implement ECE/curriculum was teachers training gap, they were few teachers who have ten and three months ECE training certificates in preschool education but they did not obtain additional appropriate training which enables them to implement current new integrated play-based curriculum. Moreover, directors and education administrators who were serving in Woreda and zone levels did not have ECE background knowledge but they act to implement rule and regulations. This finding also has direct connection to the finding that was pointed out by Tigistu (2013) majority of the existing education administrators at the different education program levels do not have directly ECE related qualifications but they have qualifications in unrelated disciplines. Thus, most of them might have very little or no specialization related to children's early years education to support provision. It is also supported by Winger (2008: 18) lack of teachers' competence or lack of qualified teachers might be one of the reasons for the children poor learning outcome.

Furthermore, previously held teachers' experiences were identified as one of the challenges that influence early childhood education provision or preschool curriculum implementation. The study that was carried out on preschool teachers confirmed that teachers previously held experience can influence their role negatively to the new curriculum implementation (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) and they decided what to teach from different sources from their previous experiences rather than the prescribed

curriculum guide. As observation result of this study showed that teachers teaching approaches were being traditionally teacher-centered; teachers were not willing to implement/practice the new integrated play-based preschool curriculum because of previously held teachers 'traditional teaching-learning experiences. For example, the study that was carried out by Murphy (2006) confirmed that if teachers' practices in preschool classrooms are largely focused on tradition of teacher-centered curricula, they meet difficulties to implement play-based curricula because learning activities require a teacher's additional times in order to prepare and provide.

The studies widely recognized that quality preschool education should equip children not only with good socio-emotional competencies, values, and dispositions, but also with early academic knowledge and skills that will help informing their abilities for lifelong learning (Wall, Litjens & Taguma, 2015). This means that both academic and nonacademic curricula vital for the further learning and development. As observed; however, teachers have competence problem to implement the play-based curriculum because of training gap, even some teachers were teaching in the preschools without preschool education background knowledge, especially in government primary school-based preschools or "O", religious and private preschools.

Lack of teachers' motivation was another challenge in implementing ECE in the preschools. As clearly pointed out by Goodman and Brand (2009) teachers who are motivated characterized as responsible, organized and are open to new learning opportunities, and they were found to be high curriculum implementers compared to teachers described as unmotivated, not open to changes. This was clearly observed in NGO preschool because teachers motivated to provide both play-based and teacher-directed academic areas because of good payment. On the contrary, teachers who were teaching in the religious and government preschools were not stay for a long times in the school and leave the preschools due to lack of motivation/low payment searching for better salary.

Finding of the study that was carried out in east Africa confirmed that teachers those who are working in ECE tend to earn much lower salaries compared to-teachers at primary or higher education levels. For example, "in Sub-Sahara Africa salaries are under US \$ 50 a month" (UNESCO, 2010:44), and teachers suffered from low levels of

payments, especially in privately based preschools. This is also true in the research areas that preschool teachers' salary was 400 to 1200(US\$ 15 to 44) per a month, especially in private, religious and government primary school-based preschools. As a result, in some preschools there was less commitment among teachers to promote children's learning and development. For instance, one of the teachers from government primary-based preschool described that teachings in preschools, especially in government schools were 'stressful' because of the lowest payment that teachers earn 400 Birr (US \$ 15) per a month. For this reason, teachers do not have interest teaching in preschools, and experienced teachers, especially those teachers who have preschool certificates left preschools and hired in other preschools or organizations which are paid relatively better salary. On the other hand to overcome economic challenges usually teachers gave tutorial program for children after the end of class (3:00am) for an hour based on the parent interests but teachers challenged in order to accomplish their responsibility in regular classes. As Mmbaga (2002) argues that teachers lack commitment when their salary is low and therefore most teachers prefer to be committed to private tuition than normal class teaching because tuition gives them an extra income. Nevertheless, most children were not happy to stay and learn after time was over or after most children had gone back to their homes, but working parents' want their children stay until they return to home rather than gaining additional skills and knowledge.

A conducive preschool physical environment could play a significant role on children's' learning and development, and offer a variety of learning opportunities so as to support each child's unique needs and challenges. Many of the observed preschools did not meet the minimum requirements of preschool standards to promote children's physical and social development. The studies that were carried out on preschool physical environment confirmed that interesting preschool physical environment design and availability of the infrastructure in the preschool can play a crucial role in children's learning and development (Joshi, 2008; ArulLawrence, 2012; Kritchevsky and Prescott, 1977). The physical environments that are well-designed and facilitated would allow children to explore experiences and experiment. Thus purposefully designed environment give them a sense of control allow the children to be engaged in focused, self-directed learning and play activities (Hohmann and Weikart, 1995; Penn, 2005). Nevertheless,

many preschools' physical environment was not planned thoughtfully in the manners that stimulate self-directed learning and social interaction. So, most preschools outdoor and indoor physical environments are not barriers free, and they have safety and facilities problems in relation to class size, spaces, and play materials arrangement.

When physical environment designed right, the child would build a sense of security, exploring in play areas that allow the children to play both independently and with others as they choose (Abbas, Othman, & Rahman, 2012; Curtis, 2001; Wolery, 2004). Well-designed design and quality of material arrangement promote positive development among preschool children. The research finding stated that social interactions with other people and objects are vital activities for growth and development of the children's brain and different experiences (Curtis, 2001). As observed nearly all preschools have facility problems such as clean toilet, water and available outdoor spaces and other related facilities to provide appropriate education.

On the other hand preschool classroom design and facilities are challenging for the implementation of preschool curriculum or ECE in the preschool. As mentioned earlier, in most preschools, classroom physical environments and designs were not convenient such as classroom size, layout, furniture, lighting, seating arrangement, because such kinds of classrooms physical environment influenced children's learning activities. Further evidence indicates that if the classroom is poorly designed and planned, it will not support children's development and learning, and it may lead to inattentive and frustrated children (Wolery, 2004; Moore 2002), because the physical environment and children's development of cognitive and social competency have direct relationships (Moore 2002; Moore 1994). The preschools indoor spaces were not convenient for the teachers and children to move freely in the classrooms. As the result, free play and child-centered activities were not carried out in the classrooms. NGO preschool; however, appropriately use the existing space arranging indoor play materials on the children height level shelves and the classrooms is wide and standardized. Many preschools there do not have play materials to facilitate child-initiated play activities in the classroom corners. As Tarman, (2011) and Berris, & Miller (2011) commented materials and equipment in the preschool playground should be age appropriate for the children to promote children's cognitive and social development. As observed, the preschools met

challenges to facilitate their preschools' indoor and outdoor environment because of shortage of important resources. For example finding land is too challenging to build additional and to widen play field in Dilla administrative town concerned officials do not respond easily respond for such questions because of scarce land resource.

On top of these, lack of people awareness about education of children with disabilities was identified as a major challenge to create preschool education opportunity for the children with disabilities. CWDs were totally discriminated from preschool education enrollment and other social services, because of social stigma and lack of awareness of the stakeholders (parents, community, teachers and preschool administrators). As stated in national preschool policy framework (MOE, 2010) and national preschool education program standard (MOE, 2009) ensured children with different disabilities to be included in preschool education program. However, CWDs were not included in any preschool education program (e.g. private, government preschools, NGO) because the existed policy was not forceful children with disabilities to be included in preschool education settings. Parents also do not have awareness about education rights of the children with disabilities; they did not obtain any awareness raising program concerning ECE, and rights of CWDs for education.

Although implementing inclusive education or providing education for children with disabilities is current policy issue in Ethiopia, still there is no observable plan in zone, Woreda and preschool levels to include children with disabilities in preschool education program. This is because culturally people do not consider as children with disabilities can learn. Such a perception made most 'preschools' did not think positively as children with abilities are able to learn and live independent life in society.

5.2. Conclusions

In the process of the ECE provision and curriculum implementation administrators, parents and teachers understanding could play a significant role. Findings of this study showed that administrators, parents and teachers have understanding about the role and values of the preschool education for children learning and development even though most participants did not have ECE background knowledge. The preschool education were also provided in different types of programs in the private, religious,

community, NGO and government primary school-based preschool or 'O' level, especially private and government primary based preschools have considerably increased. As a result, primary school based-preschool education or 'O' level program has been carried out in all government primary schools at least in two classrooms in each primary school setting providing free school readiness skills development for the children who come from low income families.

Parents who have sent their children typically have awareness of ECE and involved in children education and school performances. Finding of the study demonstrated that most preschools have strong parent-preschool relationships because parent-preschool close relationship had positive impacts on the ECE provision. Most preschools have planned quarterly permanent meetings with parents so as to discuss on the preschool issues and to report children's education progress.

As finding of this study revealed children with identified disabilities were totally discriminated from preschool education program because of the stakeholders (parents, community, teachers and preschool administrators) lack of awareness and negative attitude towards the causes of disabilities and education of children with disabilities. The preschools practiced various types of curricula that were not age appropriate relying on the types of the preschools programs. The preschools practiced various kinds of curricula from different sources but the existing new play-based curriculum did not implemented because of teachers training gap. As this study results showed participants theoretically believed equally importance of both academic and non-academic play-based curricula to be implemented; however, practically preschools allotted more time for the academic areas due to the traditionally preschools adapted experiences.

Moreover, nearly in all preschools, teacher-centered instructional approaches and lecture method are traditionally more influential strategies because of large class size and lack of play materials and traditionally teachers held teacher-centered teaching approaches. As findings of this study revealed parents traditionally demand their children learn more of academic areas curricula rather than play-based curricula.

Preschools physical environment and facilities have positively and negatively influenced on ECE education provision and curriculum implementation in relation to children learning and development. Most preschools' physical learning environment

designs do not fulfill the recommended national standards and are not barrier free for children to play and move freely. Moreover, the existing outdoor play materials and equipment that were installed over the ground in the preschools were not age appropriate, well maintained, safe, attractive, clean and accessible in order to support children's learning and development so that children preferred to play creating their own traditional plays during break and after lunch being in groups and pairs instead of using these materials. Accordingly older children prefer playing footballs which are made of old socks and small rubber balls in the field and girls also play skipping rope in group nearly in all preschools.

The study found that from eight preschools settings five of them were providing both primary and preschool programs separating with unsafe wooden fences in the same school compound. This also has influenced children's social interaction and psychomotor movements because play fields mostly occupied by the older primary school students, especially during free play time and after lunch.

Furthermore, preschools have facilities problems such as water and toilets. Thus, almost all preschools have sanitation and hygiene problems in relation to the toilet sanitation problem because of scarce water supply and other related factors. As a result, health problems could affect learning and development of the children because there is a close and interdependent relationship between education and health. Finding of this study; however, revealed that sanitation problem was serious issue in the some preschools attendance due to the health problem, children's absenteeism was occurred.

On the other hand classroom physical environment is an important learning environment that could facilitate for children's learning and social development. However, the findings of this study revealed that most preschools did not have interesting classrooms physical environment and facilities, and available play materials, displays and other age appropriate play materials in the corners of the classrooms. Besides, national standard for a classroom size is sixty three square meters in the preschool so as to accommodate maximum number of 40 children. However, most preschools do not have accomplished this standard.

A large number of children in a classroom/large class size are common in all preschools but in some preschools it is considered as a cost minimization, especially in

private preschools. In most preschool a large class size was managed using rows of desks seating arrangements. Nevertheless, the large class size adversely affected utilization of the play materials, teachers' lessons preparation times and small group activities.

In addition, as discussed earlier lack of teachers' motivation is another barrier in ECE provision because most preschools are paying the lowest payment and consequently teachers' turnover is high in those preschools. Preschool education is right for all children including CWDs/special needs as stated in the Ethiopia national education and training policy (MOE, 1994), ECE policy framework (2010) and other policy documents. As this study finding revealed; however, CWDs still do not get opportunity for the preschool education due to lack of awareness and negative attitude of administrators; teachers, parents and the community as well. Generally, still preschool gates are totally classed for children with disabilities.

5.3. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings, discussions and conclusions of the study.

Today, in the Dilla administrative town there are observable rapid growth of preschools because education administrators, private proprietors, parents and teachers have understanding about the role and values of the preschool education for children's learning and development. As a result, access of preschool education has been increased in the different types of ECE programs, like private, religious, community, NGO and government primary school-based preschool or 'O' level. However, ECE programs are not run in accordance with the national ECE policy, strategies and philosophy because preschool directors/proprietors do not have enough knowledge, and they still follow traditionally adopted teaching-learning approaches. Therefore, zone education department and Woreda education office should provide awareness raising programs and training for the preschool administrators and teachers concerning the current early childhood education policies, strategies and philosophies. Similarly preschools also should provide awareness raising programs for parents concerning the current ECE policy and strategies; how could these help for their children holistic learning and developments.

The national and regional curriculum frameworks and guides give more emphasis that the play-based curriculum to be implemented in preschools. As findings of this study showed; however, preschools have resisted implementing the new integrated play-based curriculum that was prepared and disseminated by the regional education bureau because of traditionally teachers and parents held academic areas focused curricula experiences. Furthermore, most teachers who are teaching in preschools are not competent enough to implement play-based preschool curriculum. As a result, now preschools are in confusion to implement the current integrated play-based ECE curriculum so that in order to minimize such problem, the zone education department and Woreda education office should work collaboratively and facilitate workshops, pre-service and in-service training programs for preschool teachers

On the other hand, finding of this study revealed that the preschools did not use common curriculum. The curricula practiced in the preschools were obtained from various sources and are not age appropriate, well organized and they were not impended modifying according to the children's age and schools context. Hence, all preschools have practiced various kinds of ECE curricula which are borrowed from different sources. In order to minimize such problems, therefore:

- Concerned regional education bureau, zone education department, Woreda education office and preschools should jointly prepare common or standardized age appropriate curriculum framework as much as possible cooperating with professionals, government, NGO, teachers, parents and community based on the national ECE curriculum guide so as to boost the whole preschool education system; or else because the problems is still unsolved.
- The previous play-based curriculum that was prepared by the regional education bureau and resisted by the 'preschools' should be reorganized and refined because as the result of this study showed it was not properly prepared by the joint efforts of ECE professionals, preschool teachers and parent representatives taking the existing preschool situations into consideration.

Besides, nearly all preschools indoor and outdoor physical environment were not facilitated with the available and age appropriate play materials and equipment that specifically could help to implement play-based curriculum so as to promote

children's holistic learning and development. So, preschools should be facilitated by the important supportive age appropriate locally made and purchased play materials and equipment making collaboration with parents, community, government and nongovernmental organizations.

The findings of this study also revealed that parents demand their children learn more of academic areas such as language, mathematics and science, particularly English language and literacy (reading and writing) are more demanded because English is used as an instructional media in Southern Nations, Nationalities and People Region (SNNPR) starting from grade five. For this reason parents are very ambitious their children to be capable enough at English language and literacy skills starting from the grass-root level. However, currently Woreda education office does not allow English to be used as the instructional language instead Woreda obliged Amharic to be used as the instructional media in all preschools in order to implement the new integrated play-based curriculum. This obligation might be influenced parents interest and made them sent their children to those preschools that are using English as an instructional media and give more emphasis for the English language and literacy skills development. In order to minimize such complex problems from early childhood education provision, therefore:

- Taking the parents' right into consideration, Woreda education office should allow preschools use both English and Amharic equally as the instructional media since English is an instructional language in SNNPR starting from elementary school.
- Woreda education office should also facilitate different training opportunity for teachers in order to develop, especially English language skills and knowledge that help teachers to use English effectively as the instructional language in the preschools.

Further, the findings of this study indicated that there is ECE policy frameworks in Ethiopia that urges preschool education to be accessible for all children including children with disabilities (special education needs). However, as mentioned earlier children with disabilities are totally discriminated from preschool education program because of parents, community, teachers and preschool administrators' lack of awareness and negative attitude towards the causes of disabilities and education of children with

disabilities. In order to minimize these problems and access inclusive preschool education for children with disabilities, further legislative and administrative measures might be required to create conducive situation to include children with special needs; therefore:

- Administrative officials, decision makers, planners and education experts should pay special attention children with disabilities/special needs to be included in the ECE program.
- Preschool directors/proprietors, teachers and parents and community also should be aware of the rights of persons with disabilities for education and other services.
- Preschool personnel, teachers, parents and the community awareness should be raised concerning the causes of disability and education of children with disabilities using public media (TV, radio) and social medias like ‘Ider’, ‘Mehaber’ and so on.

The regional, zone and Woreda administrators and education officials should work collaboratively with local and national NGOs and religious organizations that are working and supporting education of children with disabilities to minimize negative attitude of the people towards children with disabilities and to create inclusive preschool education opportunity for CWDs.

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Appendix 1: Themes and subthemes

Themes and subthemes

Themes and subcategories which emerged from the transcribed data, research questions, and literature review were qualitatively analyzed after many times reading and writing the transcribed data. The transcribed data were open coded reading line by line to identify words, phrases and sentences for the major themes and then, it had been written in the result part and discussed in chapter four and five.

Themes	Subthemes
1.1 The participants' understanding of the role and value of preschool education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception participants • Access for preschool education • Parent-preschool relationship • Resources availability and support system • Awareness and attitudes of the participants' towards education of CWDs
1.2 Appropriateness of the curriculum practiced in preschools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • curricula for the children's holistic learning and development • believe s children learn to their holistic development • participants demand children learn more in preschool
1.2.1 Thinking of curricula practiced in preschools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participants awareness of kinds of curricula preschools use • participants knowledge of the sources of the curricula in use • linkage of curriculum preschools use with national curriculum guide • resistance to implement the new play-based preschool curriculum
1.2.2 Instruction approaches/strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • curricula practices in classroom: teachers-centred, lecture method, whole group activities etc.
1.3 Supportive Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outdoor supportive learning environment • outdoor play materials and resources • outside classroom facilities • toilet facilities • classroom physical environment • large class size • seating arrangement
1.4 Challenges in implementing preschool curriculum/in preschool education provision	<p>Impacts for learning and development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of teachers competence • Impacts of supportive environment • Awareness and negative attitudes of the people towards education of CWDs

Appendix 2: Interview guide protocol 1

Interview for the Regional education bureau, Zone education department and Woreda education office administrators/experts

I would like to thank you for participating for interview in my research study concerning early childhood education provision for preschool children in Dilla town. The major objective of this study is to investigate the situation of early childhood education provision for preschool children with the help of available data and empirical evidence and identify the most pressing problem of early childhood education provision for pre-school children in Dilla administrative town. Let us begin by talking about current situation of early childhood education provision and challenges in preschools of Dilla town. The researcher will use the basic interview questions “as seen below”, and important and related questions will be raised as needed.

I) Background information

Gender: Male _____ Female _____

Age: _____

Position in administration: _____

Years of service in administration: _____

Education level: _____ Diploma. _____ BA. _____ MA. _____ other. _____

Education background in ECE: _____

Code: _____

I) The situation of early childhood education provision , access and policy issues

1. Would you describe the current situation of early childhood education provision particularly, in Dilla town and/or generally in Gedeo zone?
2. How do you understand the role and values of ECE for preschool children/importance of the early childhood education?
3. Do you think that the existing early childhood education curriculum is appropriate and inclusive?
4. What efforts have you made to provide early childhood education opportunities for all preschool children including children with special needs?
5. What are the prerequisites in your zone or woreda to offer license for persons who are interested to establish a new preschool?
6. What kind of curriculum the preschools are using in Dilla town? How it is planned and implemented?
7. What kind of linkages does the ongoing preschool curriculum have with the national curriculum goals /preschool education learning outcomes?
8. What supports have you made to enhance ECE provision for pre-school children?

9. How do you understand the importance of the supportive physical learning environment of preschools for children?
10. What are the major challenges in ECE provision/ preschool curriculum implementation?

II) Future prospects of early childhood education provision

11. What efforts would you want to make/suggest to make on the following issues?
 - a) To enhance the early childhood education provision.
 - b) To increase accessibility of early childhood education for all preschool children
 - c) To increase the quality of early childhood education curriculum
 - d) To enhance quality physical environment of the early childhood education/preschool settings

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you

Appendix 3: Interview guide protocol 2

2. Interview for key informant teachers and preschool directors/proprietors

Gender: male _____ female _____

Age: _____

Total number of years in teaching/administration _____

Teacher training for _____ level

Education level: _____ Diploma. _____ BA. _____ MA. _____ preschool certificate
_____ other _____ Code: _____

A) Background information

1. When you became teacher/administrator or involved in early childhood education setting? Did you have any ideas about preschool education before?
2. Where did you receive training and for how long were you trained in early childhood education? If you were not trained before, how do you deal with preschool children?
3. What other professional development opportunities have you had either individually or preschool provided in-service programs?

B) The situation of early childhood education provision

1. Would you describe/explain the current situation of early childhood education provision in your preschool?
2. How do you understand and perceive the role and values of early childhood education for preschool children?
3. What kind of curriculum is being used/practiced in your preschools? How it is implemented?
4. What are the major challenges in your preschool in implementing appropriate early childhood education curricula?
5. What kind of support have your preschool obtained from zonal education bureau and Dilla town administrative/woreda education office to overcome challenging situation in ECE provision?
6. What efforts do your preschool does to strengthen relation between preschool-parent? And how does your preschool communicate to parents?
7. How do you see the situation of your preschool physical environments in line with children learning and development? Are they inclusive and barrier free for all preschool children?
8. Does your preschool admit children with identified disabilities? If yes how? If not why?
9. What mechanisms do the preschools and you use to prevent learning difficulties of young children in your preschool?

C) The situation on academic areas /learning in early childhood education provision

1. What instruction strategies do you use in classroom? Do you use direct instruction or play- based strategies
2. How do you feel about trying to balance a focus between all the developmental domains and academic skills? What parents do believes/demands their children learn more in preschool
3. What kind of curriculum does your preschool use? Adapted or developed by the program?
4. How do your preschool curricula explicitly integrate, or connect learning across developmental domains (e.g. physical, social/emotional and cognitive) for all children?

D) Future prospects of early childhood education provision

1. What efforts would you want to make/suggest to be made on the following issues?
 - a) To enhance early childhood education provision
 - b) To increase access of early childhood education for all preschool children
 - c) To increase the quality of early childhood education curriculum
 - d) In your opinion what changes would you like to be implemented in the preschools to make education provision more effective?

E) Post observation questions

1. Do you feel you are fully implementing play-based preschool curriculum in your classroom? If yes how? If not why?
2. What specific components of curriculum activities do you feel you are not implemented in your classroom /group room? Why?
3. Why preschools became resistant to implement the new integrated curriculum?

Appendix 4: Focus group discussion guide

3. Focus group protocol

I would like to thank you all for participating in my research study concerning early childhood education provision for preschool children. Please feel free to express your ideas, feelings, and opinions at this time/any time during the discussions. Let us begin by talking about current situation and future prospects of early childhood education provision and challenges in these selected preschools. I will use the basic questions for discussion as seen below, and I will also re-direct the discussion as needed.

I) Current situation of early childhood education provision

1. How do you understand the role and value of early childhood education?
2. How do you perceive the role of early childhood education in line with learning and development of preschool children?
3. How do you see the involvement of the parents and the community in the early childhood education provision/preschool education?
4. What kind of curricula the preschools are using? (For example, academic focused or play-based). Are there any learning areas that would be stressed more than others?
5. What efforts have preschools made to provide quality early childhood education for preschool children? Are parents satisfied in the early childhood education provision?
6. How do preschools physical learning environment and facilities conducive for the children's learning and development?
7. Do the preschools admit/enroll children with identified disabilities? If not, why?
8. What are the role of parents/families as partner in children development and learning in your preschools/kindergartens?
9. In your opinion what changes would you like to be implemented in the preschool to make education provision/practices more effective?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your active participation

Appendix 5: Observation data collection sheet 1

Date: _____, Time: From _____ to _____

Observer: _____ Room: _____

Preschool/Kindergarten: _____ Group: _____

Teacher: _____

No. Of children _____ Boys _____ Girls _____

Average age number of the children: _____ Max. age: _____ Min. age _____ Sheet: _____

Name of the session/activity:			
Time	Obs. target	Description of target related activities	Observer's notes
1	Content		
2	Instruction		
3	Social interaction		

Appendix 6: Observation data collection sheet 2

Date: _____, Time: From _____ to _____

Observer: _____ Room: _____

Preschool/Kindergarten: _____ Group: _____

Teacher: _____ No. Of children _____ Boys _____ Girls _____

Average age of the children: _____ Max. age: _____ Min. age _____

Sheet: _____

Time	Description of the content/flow of the activity/activities	Observer's notes
	Description of the orientation and introduction	
	Description of the intended aim of the activity	
	Description of the activity/activities(what is done)	
	Description of the ending/concluding phase of the activity	
	Description of the transition phase to the next activity	
Other observations		

Appendix 7: Physical environment observation sheet

Date: _____, Time: From _____ to _____

Observer: _____ Outdoor: _____ Indoor: _____

Preschool/Kindergarten: _____

Physical environment		
Content	Description	Observer's notes
Layout: design and location buildings; Outdoor and indoor-spaces, -buildings (access to classrooms), -furniture, -equipment, -facilities and resources		
furniture & equipments		
Quiet area for rest		
play ground/play yard		
Safety in classroom and compound		
Other facilities (e.g. light, water, etc.)		

Appendix 8: Materials/Resources data collection sheet

Date: _____, Time: From _____ to _____

Observer: _____ Preschool/Kindergarten: _____

code: _____

Objective: To identify the availability of materials/resources for the early childhood education settings/preschools

Materials/Resources checklist:			
List of materials	Quantity	Description of materials	Observer's notes
Indoor materials			
-Blocks for constructive play -Manipulative toys -Material for imaginative play /Dramatic play materials(e.g. dolls, puppets, masks, kitchen sets) -Material used to develop language skills Material to develop cognitive skills -Musical instruments -Art materials(paints, crayons, pencil, paint			

brushes, cotton)			
Technology (computer, software, etc.)			
Musical instruments Artmaterials			
Other material observation in the classroom			

Appendix 9: Inside classroom facilities observation sheet

No.	Inside	Purpose	Measurement /quantification	
			Quantity	m2
1	Size of the class room			
2	Size &No.of windows			
3	Child - class size ratio			
4	Blackboard			
5	Shelves			
6	Teacher chair			
7	Children chair			
8	Children tables/desks			
9	Garbage			
10	First aid Room			
11	Notice board			
	Other facility	Description		
	Safety in classroom Light, air			

Appendix 10: Outside classroom materials and facilities

No	Outside	Purpose	Measurement /quantification	
			Quantity	m2
1	Size of preschool compound			
2	playground/play yard			
3	Old tyres			
4	Balancing			
5	Climbing			
6	Swings			
7	Slides			
8	Cycling			
9	Sandbox			
Other physical environment observation checklist				

Appendix 11: Buildings' observation sheet

No.	In the preschool compound	purpose	Measurement /quantification	
			Quantity	m ²
1	Children toilet &hand basin			
2	Children dining room			
3	hall			
4	Staff room			
5	Store			
6	guard's room			
7	Physiotherapy room			
8	Preschool personnel toilet room			



Ref. 3/329/152/15
Date 26/02/2018

Confirmation letter

In SNNPR Gedeo Zone Dilla town
administrative education office or
Woreda education office
Tel. 0913711146
FAX. _____

Date: 6/11/2018
To: **Addis Ababa University**
Department of Special Needs Education

This is to note that Mr Tefera Tirago has asked Dilla town administrative education office (Woreda education office) permission and cooperation to gather available information for his dissertation research from preschools and Woreda education administrators/experts regarding preschool education trend and problems in Dilla town bringing a cooperation letter which was written with Ref, No: SNED/157/05, February 12, 2013 by the Department head of Special Needs Education. Accordingly, concerned three Woreda education office administrator/experts have participated in interviews and other important supportive materials were supplied for the researcher. We also supported him when he was selected participant preschools based on his requirements and research method. In addition, Mr Tefera was asked the office to write cooperative letters for the selected preschool settings. Accordingly, we have written cooperative letters for the following preschool settings:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Sekate academy private preschool | 6. KidaneMihret/DonBosko(NGO) |
| 2. Woineshet private preschool | 7. Kofe primary school-based preschool ("O" level) |
| 3. Fares private preschool (religious) | 8. Dilla primary school-based preschool ("O" level) |
| 4. Michael private preschool (religious) | |
| 5. Dilla University community preschool | |

Generally, Mr Tefera has gathered all important information, and discussed the findings of the study with us. Eventually we would like to appreciate him working his dissertation in early childhood education because it is foundation for children learning and development.

With regards




Teaddasaa Garmaamo Baddeaal
ዳ.ደ.ሰ ገርማም በደ.ሰ.



ሰኬት ዩጥክ አካዳሚ አዕጾ ሕፃናትና
 የትምህርት ቤቅ
 Siket youth Academy K.G
 and Primary School

Ref. S/K/T 2039/2011
 Date 26-2-2011

Confirmation letter

In Gedeo Zone Dolla town administrative
Sekate academy private preschool
 Tel. _____

Date: 6/11/2018
 To: **Addis Ababa University**
Department of Special Needs Education

Mr Tefera Tirago has asked our preschool to write a confirmation letter in support of his data collection in our preschool. He brought letter of acknowledgement Woreda education office and cooperation letter from Department of Special Needs Education with the Fef, No: SNED/157/05, February 12, 2013 by the Department head of Special Needs Education as a reference to our preschool. Accordingly he has collected data through interviews from director/principal, teachers and from parents' focus group discussions, especially parents' focus group discussions were carried out in our preschool into two groups in different times. Moreover, Mr Tefera collected data through observation from inside the classroom and outside the classroom coming repeatedly for a long time, especially to follow teaching-learning practices in classrooms. Finally he has discussed the research findings with us. Therefore, we wrote this confirmation letter for his intensive efforts to collect information for his dissertation research using different data collection tools.

With regards

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TAMENE ASSEFA SHIBESHI
 ገ/ሠ/ሪ. አስኪያጅ
General Manager



Ref. D/2018/045/023/2011
Date 27/11/2011

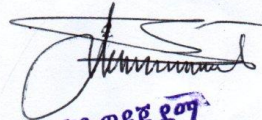
Confirmation letter

In Gedeo Zone Dolla town administrative
Woinshet preschool
Tel. _____

Date: 6/11/2018
To: **Addis Ababa University**
Department of Special Needs Education

Mr Tefera Tirago has asked our preschool to write a confirmation letter in support of his data collection in our preschool. When he asked to collect data, he brought letter of cooperation letter from Addis Ababa University Department of Special Needs Education with the Ref, No: SNED/157/05. February 12, 2013 and acknowledgement letter from Woreda education office. Accordingly he has collected required data through interviews, observations and parents' focus group discussions as well as audio, video and photographing. Finally we have discussed the research findings with him. Therefore, we wrote this confirmation letter for his intensive efforts to collect data for his dissertation research entitled: "trends and prospects of early childhood education in Dilla town" using different data collection tools making various journey to our preschool.

With regards



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Tsige Wodajo Dema
General Manager





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 የፋራስ መኖሪያ ስራ ለማድረግ
 Dilla Full Gospel Belivers Church
 Fares Kinder Garden and Primary School

Ref. 2/22/12
 Date 22/2/2011


Confirmation letter

In Gedeo Zone Dolla town administrative
Fares private preschool (religious)
 Tel. 0463310488

Date: 6/11/2018
 To: **Addis Ababa University**
Department of Special Needs Education

This is to confirm that Mr Tefera Tirago has asked our preschool to write a confirmation letter in support of his data collection in our preschool. Accordingly, he has collected data through interviews, observations and focus group discussion. Director/principal and teachers participants were actively participated in interviews. Parents' focus group discussion was also carried out in our preschool calling parents according to the research requirement and selection method. In addition data were collected from our preschool through observation by the researcher from inside and outside the classroom making various journeys for a long time to collect additional data, especially to collect information from classroom concerning teaching-learning practices. Finally we have discussed the research findings with the researcher. Therefore, we have offered this confirmation letter for his intensive efforts to collect data from our preschool.

With regards


 Dawassa Dasha
 DIRECTOR

Ref. 327/ST.M.S/11

Date 28.08.11.E.C

Confirmation letter

In Gedeo Zone Dolla town administrative
Snt. Michael preschool
Tel. 046 331 45 47

Date: 6/11/2018

To: **Addis Ababa University**
Department of Special Needs Education

Mr Tefera Tirago has asked our preschool to write confirmation letter from our preschool for his dissertation work entitled "trends and prospects of early childhood education in Dilla town". Accordingly we confirm that Mr Tefera has collected ample data since February 2, 2013 coming repeatedly through interviews, observations, focus group discussions, audio, video and photographing. We have also supported him providing available information that helps to rich his dissertation research. After the completion of the dissertation he has discussed the findings of the study with us.

With regards




Grubel Temesgen
Director

Ref. D/UC/15/919
Date 20/02/2011

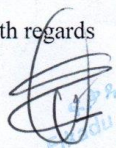
Confirmation letter

In Gedee Zone Dolla town administrative
Dilla University community preschool
Tel. 0912 687227

Date: **6/11/2018**
To: **Addis Ababa University**
Department of Special Needs Education

This is to confirm that Mr Tefera Tirago has collected data for a long time and he has repeatedly visited to verify data that have been collected. This means that he has collected all necessary data through interviews (from director and teacher), observations and parents' focus group discussions including audio, video and photographing. We have also supported him providing available information that helps him to develop his dissertation that is carried out on preschool education. Finally we have discussed findings of the study with him.

With regards


Eshetu Deyasso Dukalle
Principal



Ref.-----
Date 27/02/2011

Confirmation letter

In Gedeo Zone Dolla town administrative
KidaneMiret/DonBosco preschool
Tel. 09880-51886

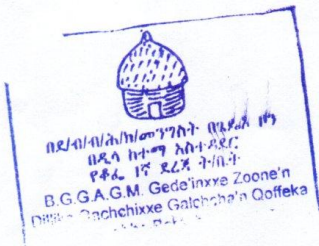
Date: **6/11/2018**
To: **Addis Ababa University**
Department of Special Needs Education

Mr Tefera Tirago has asked our preschool to write a confirmation letter in support of his data collection in our preschool. When the data were collected he brought letter of cooperation from Gedeo zone administration bureau. Accordingly we have supported and cooperated with him to collect important data through interviews, observations and focus group discussions. Furthermore, Mr Tefera collected data from inside the classroom and outside the classroom through observation taking a long time and making repeated journey to gather additional data which might help him to verify already collected data before. Finally he has discussed the study findings with us. Therefore, we wrote this confirmation letter for his intensive efforts to collect information from our preschool for his dissertation research entitled: "Trends and prospects" using different data collecting instruments.

With regards



Handwritten signature in blue ink.



Ref. Koffelel school 16019/02
Date 7/11/2018

Confirmation letter

In Gedeo Zone Dolla town administrative
Kofe primary school-based preschool ("O")
Tel. 0463312652

Date: **6/11/2018**
To: **Addis Ababa University**
Department of Special Needs Education

Mr Tefera Tirago has asked our school to write confirmation letter from our preschool regarding data collection for his dissertation work entitled "trends and prospects of early childhood education in Dilla town". Accordingly we confirm that Mr Tefera has collected data concerning early childhood education from "O" level program since February 12, 2013 coming repeatedly through interviews, observations and focus group discussions as well as audio, video and photographing. Finally, Mr Tefera has discussed the findings of the study with us.



With regards

Handwritten signature
አብራሃም ገረገሪያ ገረገሪያ
Abraham Dorrna Golle
የተ/ቤተ/ር/መምህራን
ገረገሪያ ገረገሪያ ገረገሪያ
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Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this Dissertation is my original work and has not been presented for any other degree, and that all sources of materials used for the Dissertation have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Tefera Tirago

Signature: _____

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a university advisor of the School of Post Graduate Studies, College of Education and Behavioral Studies Department of Special Needs Education, Addis Ababa University.

Advisor: Associate Professor Alemayehu Teklemariam

Signature: _____

Date of Approval: _____