

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND BEHAVIORAL STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF PRACTICING O-  
CLASS IN BURAYU TOWN

BY

HAILU SEBSIBE CHEMEDA

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# Challenges and Opportunities of Practicing O-class in Burayu Town

By

Hailu Sebsibe Chemedda

Approval of the Board of Examiners

1. Advisor

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

2. Internal Examiner

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

3. External Examiner

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFA	Education for All
ESDP	Education Sector Development Program
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
NCES	National Census for Education Statistics
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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## *Abstract*

*This study attempted to assess the current challenges and opportunities of practicing O-class in Burayu Town. To achieve this purpose, qualitative research method was employed. Participants of this study were O-class teachers, school directors, parents of O-class students and ECCE experts of the town. The schools, O-class teachers, school directors and ECCE experts participated in the study were selected by purposive sampling methods whereas parents were selected by random sampling method. Observation, in depth interview, FGD and document review were used to collect data. The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic data analysis technique. Results obtained revealed that the studied primary schools with O-classes have no adequate classrooms, outdoor materials and equipment, conducive playgrounds, basic educational materials and trained O-class teachers. Furthermore, in the schools participated in this study the O-class program suffer from lack of budget, lack of water and child sized toilets, inaccessibility of the schools for students with disabilities and lack of its own administration though it has opportunities like commitment of the government to expand the program and increased parents' demand for the program. To improve the implementation of O-class in Burayu town, it is better if the government allocate adequate budget for the O-class program.*

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Education enables individuals and societies to make all rounded participation in the development process by acquiring knowledge, ability, skill and shaping attitudes. Cognizant of this, the Ethiopian Government has given due attention to education (MoE, 2010).

Early Childhood Care and Education/ECCE is one of the priorities for the education sector because it will be one of the potential inputs to the overall improvement of quality of education and reduction of drop out and repetition rates in later stages of formal schooling. Participating in Early Childhood Care and Education leads to higher enrolments, increase high school graduation rates, improve performance on standardized tests, and reduce the number of children to be placed in Special Needs Education (MoE, 2010).

Affordable and reliable Early Childhood Education provides essential support for working parents, particularly mothers. Investment in quality ECCE yields a high economic return, offsetting disadvantage and inequality, especially for children from poor families. Besides, ECCE has positive effects on female labor force participation and schooling of older siblings. It also levels the playing field by reducing inequalities between rich and poor and it is thus a key component to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty (MoE, 2010).

ECCE strives to offer children a foundation for development of social skill, self- confidence, motivation and cognition. Children acquire a verity of important skills, knowledge and attitudes that will affect their ability to learn personal development, relationship with other, and future participation in a great society (Curtis 1998, as cited in Sisay, 2013). Smith (2001) also indicated that early education is termed as the foundation stage of education, where children experience rapid physical, emotional, intellectual and social growth. Tirussew (2005) also pointed out that due to the exposure of the child to new experiences, early childhood education is the time when children need to develop skills of social interaction with peers, caregivers and teachers which lays a base for subsequent development of the child.

On the other hand, participating in ECCE is right of a child and it has been considered as a bed rock of EFA and the first step in meeting all the other EFA goals (Sisay 2013).

Early Childhood Care and Education period is the most intensive period of brain development throughout the lifespan and therefore is the most critical stage of human development. Thus, participating in Early Childhood Care and Education during the early years is critical. This implies that early exposure to learning experiences in a stimulating environment will lead children to perform better in primary schools, solve problem of their life and contribute towards the development of their community. Barbara Bibber (1903, as cited in Sosina, 2013) also stated that schooling must enable a child to solve the real problem of his life more efficiently with a greater yield of happiness to himself and a greater promise of service to the community in which s/he will live as an adult.

According to Ministry of Education Educational Statistics Annual Abstract (2015), ECCE which was formerly called preschool education includes kindergarten, O-class and Child to Child programs. Child to Child is a program in which older brothers or sisters teach their younger ones about letters. Kindergarten is a preschool program that prepares children for education in three year. A program that prepares children who did not access Kindergarten or other preschools program just before joining primary education. Among theses the most widespread response of local government for children who did not have the chance to attend kindergarten program is O-class. In 2006 E.C. at national level 1,578,494 children were attending in ‘‘O’’ class program. This implies that in the country about 50% of children accessing ECCE were through O-class (MoE, 2015). According to MoE (2015), though the gross enrolment has shown an improvement from the previous years, still it is negligible compared to the number of children i.e. 7,354,626 expected to participate in Early Childhood Care and Education in either ways (MoE, 2015).

### **1.2.Statement of the Problem**

Early Childhood Care and Education is one of the most important level of education where children are expected to develop mentally (cognitive development), socially and emotionally. It also gives an opportunity for the child to develop communication skills. This implies that proper implementation of the program contributes to overall development of children who will be future leaders of the country. Due to the recognition of the contribution of the program, Early Childhood Care and Education, the demand for preschool education has been increasing from time to time.

Accordingly, the Ethiopian Government has developed Early Childhood Care and Education Policy and Strategic Framework that focuses on enhancing the quality, accessibility and equitable distribution of services in 2010. As a result, the gross enrolment ratio of preschool has been increasing from year to year though still the demand of Early Childhood Education is not quenched.

Different research results showed that Early Childhood Care and Education has been suffering from many challenges besides to its inaccessibility for children from disadvantaged families of urban residents in particular and rural parts of the country in general. It has been facing challenges like lack of qualified human resource, lack of appropriate indoor and outdoor materials, instructional resources, first aid services, lack of community participation and supervision and support from stakeholders (Sisay, 2013 and Tirussew, 2005). Similarly, many studies have been conducted by many researchers on ECCE from different angles. For instance, Rahel (2014) focused on quality of Early Childhood Care and Education in Government ECCE centers in Bole and Kirkos Sub-cities in Addis Ababa, Girma (2014) emphasized on quality of Early Childhood Care and Education in Addis Ababa from the caregiver child interaction, parental perception, and social competence of children, Yigzaw and Srinivas (2015) on practice, benefits and challenges of Early Childhood Care and Education in general but not on O-class.

It is a short time memory that the Ethiopian Government has introduced O-class in 2003 E.C. or 2011/2012 as a new initiative to enroll children who did not get access to attend a three years kindergarten program. Due to this, there were few researches conducted on O-class. While the researcher has been working for local NGO that works on child development, he noticed that parents of O-class students were complaining a lot about Burayu area O-class from different angles.

Therefore, the researcher has found that it is important to conduct research on O-class in Burayu town to identify challenges and opportunities of O-class related to qualified human resource, instructional materials, age, gender and family background of students participating in O-class, participation of parents and physical environment of schools.

### **1.3. Basic Research Questions**

The main purpose of this study was to identify challenges and opportunities of practicing O-class in Burayu town. Therefore, through this research, the following basic questions will get answer.

- 1) To what extent trained human power are assigned for O-class?
- 2) Is the school physical environment conducive for students attending O-class?
- 3) Are the necessary teaching and learning materials available for O-class teachers and students?
- 4) What is the extent of engagements of parents in implementing O-class?

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

O-class is one of the new initiatives or programs that the Ethiopian Government has introduced to cover the access gaps in Early Childhood Care and Education. Thus, findings and recommendations drawn from this study may contribute for educational office of the town to devise strategy to overcome, challenges of O-class and uses available potentials of O-class. It could also add some insights and empirical evidence to what has been known already and could serve as a springboard for further in depth study.

### **1.5.Scope of the Study**

It is possible to study on challenges and opportunities of O-class from different angles. But due to inadequacy of time and resource, this study is limited to explore challenges and opportunities of O-class in terms of trained human resource, availability of instructional materials, parent engagement and favorability of physical environment of the schools for children.

### **1.6.Limitation of the Study**

The study would have been more fruitful if it embraces all preschools found in Burayu town. But such a large scale study requires much resource, time and manpower. Therefore, for the matter of manageability the study is delimited to only three primary schools with O-classes.

### **1.7.Definition of Operational Terms**

**O-class:** A program that prepares children who did not access Kindergarten or other preschools program just before joining primary education.

**Challenge:** Is a problem that O-class faces from different angles etc.

**Opportunity:** Favorable conditions for the implementation of O-class program.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Related Literatures**

#### **2.1. Historical Development of ECCE in the World**

The German educator Friedrich Froebel started the first Kindergarten in 1837 in Blankenburg, Prussia. Froebel chose the German term Kindergarten which was literally to mean children's garden because he intended the children in his school to grow as freely as flowers in a garden. Froebel's idea was influenced mainly by the work of Johan Amos Comenius, who in the 17<sup>th</sup> century introduced the idea that school should teach infants. Another influence was made by the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, who wrote *Emile* (1762), a treatise on child's education in nature. In addition, the Swiss education reformer Johann H. Pestalozzi, who founded a school for infants in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century also influenced Froebel (Curtis, 1998 and Gezehagn, 2005). The fundamental ideas behind Froebel's concept of the Kindergarten were giving happiness to children by providing them with necessary environment for growth. He designed special play materials and introduced the idea of associating actions with singing songs (Seinfeld, 1989 as cited in Sisay, 2013). Froebel not only influenced the European pre-school education system but he also brought the concept of the Kindergarten to America when the German immigrant Margareta Meyer Schurz opened the first Kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin in 1856. The Kindergarten is now an established part of American education, and many of Froebel's ideas of childhood experience and methods of play have been incorporated into current theories of early childhood education and progressive schooling. Bruce (1991, as cited in Gebregizaber, 2014) described that Froebel's emphasis on learning through play is strongly supported music, stories and games have continued to be significant component of Kindergarten programming.

Jean Piaget's (1896, as cited in Gebregziabher, 2014) demonstrated that children in Kindergarten learn through manipulation of their physical world and make judgments on the basis of the way things took to them. It also provided the basis of the identification and description of a developmental growth sequence in children where each stage is characterized by special modes of thinking about and responding to the environment.

Maria Montessori was also another person who contributed for the development of Early Child Care and Education. She developed educational theory which combined ideas of scholar Froebel, Anthropologist Givseooe serge, French Physician Jean Itard and Eduard segueing (Bloch and Popkewitz, 2000).

Papalia and Olds (1990, as cited in Gebregziabher, 2014) noted that for more than 50 years, educators had recognized that children from a deprived socioeconomic background enter school with considerable limitation of knowledge because their parents struggle to survive, may have little time to support and recreate them. Hence, the best known compensatory Kindergarten program called “Project Head Start” was established in America with the aim of providing health care, intellectual enrichment, and a supportive environment to the children from low income families could improve their everyday effectiveness in dealing with the present and preparing for the future. From the above mentioned concepts, it is possible to say that each country has its own unique historical background about the concept and importance of early childhood education.

## **2.2. Historical Development of ECCE in Ethiopia**

Two major systems characterized for the development of education in Ethiopia: the traditional and the western systems. The traditional education system was deeply rooted in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and is recognized as one of the oldest education system in the world. For centuries, Orthodox Church monasteries and convents were the only center for formal school from Kindergarten through the university level Pankhurst (as cited in Hoot, Szente and Belete,2004). Although it was scant and exclusive for males, Kindergarten were available during the traditional medieval periods in Ethiopia. During the medieval period male children began attending church services at around age 4. The curriculum for children of this age consisted primarily of drill and practice of alphabets. Mastery of the alphabet was followed by reading and recitations of religious texts that began with the psalms of David ( Zaray,2011 as cited in Sisay, 2013).

In Ethiopia, the first modern Kindergarten was established in Dire Dawa for the children of French consultants who were helping the construction of the first railroad in Ethiopia in 1900 (MoLSA and MoE, 1990 as cited in UNESCO-IICBA, 2010). But Bizunesh (1993, as cited in Demmissie, 1996), Amelework (2007) and Aregash (2005, as cited in Temesgen 2006) argue that the year of establishment of the first Kindergarten in Ethiopia was 1908.

Demeke (2007, as cited in Sisay, 2013) praised the Socialist revolution of 1966 E.C as a farming point in the history of early childhood education in Ethiopia that resulted in an establishment of an independent commission called “Ethiopia Children’s Commission” in 1973 E.C with a task of caring and educating Ethiopian children. To begin its job with the then mission, a manual for Kindergarten in Ethiopia was produced by the commission for the first time in 1974 E.C. After the revolution, Kindergarten expanded from urban to rural area significantly in such a way that it grew in number from 77 to 912 accompanied by its enrollment growth of 7,573 to 102,000 from 1975 to 1990. Following the Socialist revolution of 1974, Kindergarten education become part of the national education policy and then its curriculum was developed for the first time ( Demeke, 2007 as cited in Sisay, 2013).

In 1994, the Ethiopian government introduced a new education and training policy which recognized Kindergarten education as a very important element in the overall development of early childhood and for the preparation of formal schooling (MoE, 1994). According to MoE (2002), Kindergarten education is the Kindergarten preparatory education for children aged 4–6 and can take up to three years. In this program, children are offered a fun education that would enable them to express their feelings, to appreciate beauty, and to learn to distinguish and form letter and numbers.

According to education and training policy of 1994, the opening of Kindergarten seems to be left to private investors and religious organizations, and to the parents who can afford to pay the fees. The government indirectly supports the initiative and provides professional pedagogical training, childcare, health, counseling, and advice for private Kindergarten teachers. Furthermore, the government provides short term training on how to improve their quality and efficiency in Kindergarten education. MoE (2002) stressed that enrolment in Kindergarten in Ethiopia is run by non-government organization, owned by community, missions, and private individuals, religious institutions wishing to enhance the involvement of the private sector in education and also maximize the government’s efforts at other levels of education. The New Education and Training Policy (1994), sets the aim of Kindergarten education in the country as the all-round social, emotional, intellectual and physical development of the child in preparation for formal schooling. Based on this aim, MoE set different regional states of the country to adopt the general objectives of Kindergarten education. As a result preschool education enrollments increased significantly.

In 2010, the Ethiopian government developed Early Childhood Care and Education Policy and Strategic Framework. Following the development of the framework, the Ethiopian government introduced a new initiative called O-class in 2011/12 to enroll children who did not get access to attend a three years kindergarten program. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) which was formerly called preschool education includes Kindergarten, O-class and Child to Child programs. Among these the most widespread response of local government for children who did not have the chance to attend preschool program is O-class (MoE, 2015).

### **2.3. Children Eligibility for Preschool**

Preschool was designed to be a developmental year for children with the understanding that the development of children at this age varies widely, as does their test taking ability. Some children are beginning to learn to read and write at early ages, while others are just learning their letters at early ages. Familiarization of children with school environment also varies depending on their experience. Some children may have spent time in center based early care and education programs whereas for others Kindergarten is their first encounter with regular and prolonged peer group interactions. This variation in experience and development forces policy makers and educators to make decisions regarding Kindergarten entrance age. This specific age at which children need to enter preschool is a common question for policy makers, parents, teachers, and administrators (Stipek, 2002 as cited in Sosina, 2013). Datar (2006, as cited in Girma, 2014) noted that a motivation behind the trend of raising the minimum entrance age for preschool is that it allows children to enter school at a time when they are ready to learn.

Cut off birthdates for preschool entry eligibility vary among countries, creating differences in age at entry, meaning that children enrolled in preschool for the first time can vary from country to country. For instance, in the United States preschool entrance age is generally around five years of age (60 months) and compulsory attendance age, varies from state to state and ranges from age five to age eight (NCES, 2000).

In Ethiopia, preschool education has been implemented in three approaches. These are: the three-year Kindergarten program for children of ages 4–6 years old; O-Class for children of age 6 years

old who are approaching school entry age; and an interim accelerated child readiness programme for children with no prior exposure to early learning, shortly before they enter grade 1 (MoE, 2015).

#### **2.4. Parents Participation and Responsibilities in Preschool**

It is clear that parent-school partnership in early years is immensely important for children's overall development. Preschool working in isolation from parent and local community is impotent. Cooperation between both parties that is the preschool and the parents will benefit the preschool, the parent and the child. Marrison (1986, as cited in Sosina, 2013) stated that parents who visit schools in which their children learn have a good opportunity to understand their children, teachers, the purposes & methods of preschool and work constructively with teachers on the entire activity of the school. Parents who share ideas and feelings with teachers accommodate more guidance to the teachers about their children, so that it would help the teachers to adjust their lessons. The parents can also have a chance to gain more realistic pictures of their child's strengths and weaknesses. A working parent can also maintain a positive relationship with the preschool teachers and develop understanding how the school operates by participating in parents committee, conducting discussion with teachers and attending annual general meetings. They expect schooling to help their children develop creative thinking and acquire skills, value and attitudes necessary for them to lead productive lives and become responsible citizens (Dirbesa, 2010 as cited Sosina, 2013). These make parents to contribute a lot for quality education as they invest in their child's education.

According to Terri Jo Swim (2009) children perform better in school if their parents are involved in their education. Parents can do many things to support and be involved in their child's learning – for example, they can provide encouragement and express interest in their child's education. Parents can expect that teachers will be culturally aware and sensitive to the school-community relationship and that teachers will support parental involvement in school life. It also informs parents about what their children are learning and why learning is important. This awareness will further enable parents to communicate with teachers, to offer relevant information, and to ask questions about their child's progress. Knowledge of their child and awareness of the teacher's observations will also help parents to interpret the assessment of their child's learning and to work with the teacher to improve and facilitate their child's progress. Various evidences have shown that partnerships that recognize the rightful role and responsibility of parents can provide an

opportunity to have a say on decision making in various aspect of the preschool activities. Parents can serve in policy council, on sub-committees, and play a supportive role in fund raising and various issues related to children's learning.

### **2.5.The Role of Teachers and Schools in Supporting Parental Involvement**

Parents' communication with schools and parental involvement are also influenced by school characteristics (Feuerstein, 2001 as cited in Donna and Sue, 2008). Schools play a strong role in determining the level and nature of parental involvement. Critical factors include teachers' beliefs about parents' role in the classroom and their responsibility to provide involvement opportunities to parents. Schools can help parents to be involved in child's learning by offering a range of options for engagement. Supporting parental involvement requires knowledge of teachers on how to involve parents, as well as leadership and support from the school administration. Kerbow and Bernhardt (1993, as cited in Donna et al. 2008) noted that some schools seem to have more ability than others to promote parent involvement. Schools can help parents decide to be involved by offering a range of options for interactions that take parental needs into account.

Invitations to parents to be involved convey to parents that their involvement is welcomed and valued and provide motivation to be involved. Important invitations come from three sources: the school, teachers, and children themselves (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005 as cited in Emerson, L., Fear. J., Fox, S., and Sanders, E. 2012). A school climate that conveys to parents that they are welcome in the school is essential. Parents can also be kept well-informed about their children's learning. The school staff can show respect for parental concerns and suggestions. Such a school climate sets a strong foundation for involvement.

Invitations from the teacher build personal trust that is the basis for creating a partnership around children's learning at home and at school. Invitations from children for help with their learning can also prompt involvement. This is consistent with developmental research that children's behaviors can influence parents' socialization practices

### **2.6. Preschool Teachers' Qualification**

One of the factors that can affect quality of preschool education is qualification of preschool teachers. The more qualified the teachers, the better they facilitate learning of their children and evaluate the overall learning process. Andrew, J. (1970, as cited in Girma, 2014) stressed child

development is an essential subject of study for everyone who works with young children. People who work with children need to be carefully trained as well as informed about how children develop and learn. Because the child is crucial in the program of pre-school education. It is now widely recognized that well trained and qualified teachers are essential components of preschool programs that result in improved outcomes for young children (Barnett, 2003 as cited in Beniam, 2014). Children who are educated by teachers with both a Bachelor's Degree and specialized training in child development and early education have been found to be more sociable, exhibit a more developed use of language, and perform at a higher level on cognitive tasks than children who are cared for by less-qualified adults (Bowman, 2000). The long-term impacts of high-quality preschool programs on children's social and academic success has contributed to an increased demand for qualified preschool teachers (Campbell, 2001 as cited in Beniam, 2014). High qualification of ECCE teachers are also essential for addressing pervasive and persistent educational problems such as low reading and math achievement, particularly of children from low socioeconomic circumstances (Ackerman, 2004). Similarly, results of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study from England have shown that key explanatory factors for high-quality ECCE were related to teachers with higher qualifications, teachers with leadership skills and long serving teacher; trained teachers working alongside and supporting less qualified teachers; teachers with a good understanding of child development and learning (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010 as cited in Sosina, 2013).

The training duration of preschool teachers vary from country to country based on the nature of the program offered. The survey study made by UNESCO on 67 United Nations member countries shows that most of them found to offer courses that last for two years. However, the study showed that in some countries there were no specified certification records other than completion of primary or secondary level. With regard to this, Ethiopia has developed the Strategic Operational Plan and Guidelines for ECCE which clearly puts teachers of preschool should hold a 10-month preschool teacher training course certificate from the Teacher Education Institute, or have attended a 2-month course to upgrade their skills and knowledge, especially in the field of active learning of young children (MoE, 2010).

## **2.7. Roles of Teachers in Preschool**

Roles of a preschool teacher are challenging; it's a demanding profession both physically and emotionally. However, it is one of the most fulfilling occupations to see children grow and develop. Preschool teachers play an important role in ensuring that no child starts school without the basic skills they need to succeed in their future life. To create such a learning environment that enables a child to acquire basic skills to start school, a teacher has many responsibilities. Some of the major roles and responsibilities of a preschool teacher are planning, facilitation, observation, supervision, participation in activities with children, communicator of parents, and encourager of engagement of all children (Jackman, 2001). The preschool teachers are expected to serve as educator, surrogate parent and psychologist in order to mold students who are well-adjusted and eager to learn.

According to Miller (1999), as a facilitator the preschool teacher is expected to be role model for children in any of his/her activities with the children. The teacher also needs to engage in activities with children rather than presenting how something should or must be done. To get confidence and the required support from parents, the teacher must develop strategy to communicate with parents of the children.

As an observer, a preschool teacher is expected to watch children while they play and do tasks. This enables the teacher to identify the skills the child has mastered or skills that need additional reinforcements. This helps the teacher to identify and plan for skills that require extra time. The teacher is expected to keep records of observations on each of his/her students. According to Jennie (2003, as cited in Labuschagne, 2015) observations, collection of child's work and developmental checklists help the teachers to arrive at a good overview of the child's strengths, needs and interests. Children watch everything an adult does, so teachers are expected to be a role model in the eyes of their students. Social skills, such as cooperation, getting along with others, and communicating well to solve problems can be modeled through actions and words of the teachers (Jennie, 2003 as cited in Labuschagne, 2015). If teachers use the words "please" and "thank you" throughout the day, the children will learn how to be courteous and polite. As teachers engaged in different activities, they must talk to the children about what they are doing and feeling. This will enable the students to learn how to do things.

Another important role of the teachers is managing the environment in early childhood setting. Management in early education is a direct result of understanding child development, establishing a philosophy, and determining goals and objectives. Jackman (2001) stated the teacher's role as a supervisor and manager includes being responsible for setting up and maintaining a safe, developmentally appropriate environment, observing and listening to the children, on-the-spot training for aides and volunteers, and communicating with parents. The teacher should set clear, consistent, and fair limits for classroom and playground behavior, guide younger children toward appropriate ways to relate to others and to function in a group environment.

Preschool teachers need to be aware of the curriculum expectations for grade 1 and later primary grades. Knowledge of the literacy and numeracy continua, in particular, is critical for teachers as they lay the foundation for learning. Teachers should also promote integrated learning and allow children to handle, explore, and experiment with a variety of materials that are familiar to them or that they can connect to everyday life. Teachers should also be a balance between teacher-initiated and child initiated activities. Teachers should also use their knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which the children live to develop and provide learning experiences that are meaningful, relevant, and respectful.

## **2.8. Preschool Environment**

The physical environment of preschool school needs to be safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences for promoting children's learning and development. Appropriate designing and locating the premises for the operation of a service is necessary. A well designed and richly decorated learning environment not only creates a relaxed and pleasurable atmosphere, but also promotes effective learning for the children. According to Pairman and Terreni (2001), the early childhood environment can be seen as an additional teacher since it gives signs and messages for learners to act on. The environment "speaks" to the learners and tells them what to do, how they can do it, where they can do it and how they can work together with other learners. The objects/equipment in a room and how it is arranged can have an effect on the behavior of learners and give them cues or messages to act on.

The quality of the environment at the preschool plays a substantial role in the quality of stimulation and teaching (Marotz, 2009 as cited in Labuschagne, 2015). In order to give learners adequate stimulation, the learning environment needs to be developmentally appropriate with a variety of

apparatus. Additionally, teachers should have the necessary skills and trainings to be able to facilitate learning within a quality learning environment that will help to holistically develop the learner (Vaughan, 2007 as cited in Labuschagne, 2015). A safe, nurturing and stimulating environment that provide for differences in learners' ages, abilities and developmental levels is crucial for maximum stimulation. Both the indoor and outdoor environments play an important role in stimulation of the learners per their developmental needs (Marotz, 2009 as cited in Labuschagne, 2015).

### *2.8.1. Indoor Environment*

Labuschagne (2015) stated that teachers should pay attention to properly setting up the classroom with the help of a comprehensive and detailed plan of how the classroom can best be arranged. These arrangements aim at providing an environment with adequate space for free movement and easy access to toys and learning materials, and serve the purpose of stimulating children to learn. Similarly, the strategic guidelines of the MoE (2010) stated learning environments in preschools should have wide varieties of stimulating play and learning materials that promote not only simple but also higher thought processes like puzzles, riddle and guessing games, stories and fairy tales, visually rich in color, etc. The indoor environment should also be friendly, providing adequate opportunity for interactions among children as well as between children and adults. The preschool classroom should be organized into interest areas or centers filled with a variety of materials and equipment including blocks, dramatic play supplies, science activities, books, art supplies and more.

Children must have time to experiment with measuring, counting, pouring, and making predictions using available indoor materials. Paper, scissors, markers, puzzles, and other hands-on materials that foster children's thinking and problem solving skills should be readily available. Books, printed words and samples of children's writing should be in every area of the classroom.

As stated by Dosen (1994), preschools need to consider providing activities indoor for the children in the program by taking into consideration to provide appropriate equipments and the individual needs of the children. According to Jennie (2003, as cited in Labuschagne, 2015), class room walls and floors must be decorated by different charts that summarizes alphabets, numbers, words, pictures and others. The indoor class room environment should enable the students to move their

chair from place to place to form groups and participate in a group discussion that will improve the communication skills of the students.

### *2.8.2. Outdoor Environment*

The selection of outdoor equipment and materials emphasizes safety, durability, and age appropriateness for all children. The outdoor space should contribute to physical, intellectual, creative, emotional, and social development and offer a variety of stimulation for play and exploration. MoE (2010) also stated in the strategic document that outdoor play equipment must be well maintained, clean and developmentally appropriate that can provide ample opportunity for creativity and development of different skills. Play equipment should also be arranged in an organized manner to allow for accident-free play. Play equipment for outdoor as suggested by Jackman (2001) include: permanent and take-apart climbers, sturdy wooden crates and barrels, railroad ties surrounding sand box, tire swings with holes punched in several places for drainage, slides, inner tubes, balance beam, tricycles, wagons, other wheeled toys, plastic hoops, chimneys, rubber balls of various sizes, mounted steering wheel, sturdy cardboard boxes, etc can be used in preschool setting. The teacher should think creatively of new ways to bring the indoor activities outside, and the outdoor activities inside, while at the same time keeping in mind the skills to be developed.

In outdoor play safety is the first priority. At least two adults should be supervising the playground at all times. Jackman (2001) advises, “Outdoor time requires adults who are playful, have sharp senses and quick reactions, and who will closely observe children. Children need safety and enough space where they can play, jump, run, rest, observe natural and manmade objects, create things themselves and the like. In early childhood physical exercise helps build strong bones, muscle strength and lung capacity. It may also increase cognitive function, improve academic achievement and accelerate neuro-cognitive processing.

## **2.9.Social Environment**

The term social environment refers to the way that a classroom environment influences or supports the interactions that occur among young children, teachers, and family members. A well-designed social environment helps foster positive peer relationships, creates positive interactions between adults and children, and provides opportunities for adults to support children to achieve their social goals. To create a classroom environment that supports positive social interactions, teachers need

to plan activities such as group discussion time, story time, meal times, and outside time. Small groups allow more time for interaction with individual children and are ideal for teaching new skills and providing feedback. Additionally, small groups offer more opportunities for children to practice their language skills and for teachers to facilitate children's communication development

### **2.10. Materials and Books**

The most appropriate materials to be included in a classroom are open-ended materials that may be used for multiple purposes. Manipulative materials that may be put together in many different ways and incorporated into other activities are a good example of an open-ended, multiple-use material (Miller, 1996, as cited in Gebregziabher, 2014). Books should be available to be "read" by children individually, in pairs, and in small groups. Books should be available for teachers to read to children too. In addition to regular books, stories on tape, filmstrips, and movies provide alternative modes for children who do not attend to regular books.

Shelves in an early childhood classroom should be filled with the latest and best materials in a way that is developmentally appropriate. The manner in which the materials are presented to the children, their accessibility, and the open-ended way in which the children are encouraged to explore and play with the materials are the indicators of appropriate maximum use of materials.

### **2.11. Curriculum**

Dodge (1995, as cited in Sosina, 2013) asserts that it is important for educators to be guided by a curriculum framework that is based on child development theory. Not doing so could lead to inappropriate practices in children classrooms as well as decisions that could be harmful to children.

A well-planned and coordinated curriculum is crucial. It ensures that important learning areas are covered and can act as a tool to shape staff behavior to ensure continuous child development based on their age category. Therefore, it helps to promote quality service across age groups of students, support professional staff in their practice, facilitate communication between staff and parents and ensure pedagogical continuity between preschool and primary school (Sosina, 2013).

According to Orkin, K., Abebe, W., Yadete and Woodhead, M. (2012), the national ECCE curriculum and national grade 1 curriculum do not align with each other. The national ECCE curriculum envisions play-based, mother tongue ECCE instruction. In contrast, the National grade

1 curriculum currently anticipates that children will learn basic numeracy and literacy in pre-school. Probably this may be a reason for most private schools to focus on literacy & numeracy learning than on overall development of the enrolled child.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Methods**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The main purpose of this study was to identify challenges and opportunities of practicing O-class in Burayu town. To achieve this purpose, a qualitative research approach was employed. It was selected because it enables to clearly describe about the challenges and opportunities of practicing of O-class in the town.

#### **3.2. Sources of Data**

Primary and secondary data were used in conducting this study. The primary sources of data were school directors, O-classes teachers, experts of ECCE from education office of the town and parents of O-class students. Secondary data were collected from reviewed reports of Burayu town Education Office and primary schools with O-classes participated in the study.

#### **3.3. Samples and Sampling Techniques**

In Burayu town, there are eight government primary schools with O-classes. These schools have a total of 20 O-class teachers. Of the eight primary schools with O-classes, three primary schools with O-classes were selected purposefully to participate in the study because of their nearest location to the residence of the researcher. The schools selected to participate in the study have 6 O-class teachers. All these O-class teachers were selected by purposive sampling method. Education Office of the town has two ECCE experts and only of them were randomly selected to be participant of the study. On the other hand, the schools participated in the study have 350 parents. More specifically, the first school has 120, the second schools has 80 and the third school has 150 parents in their list. 24 parents were selected by randomly sampling method from the list of parents to participate in FGDs.

#### **3.4. Data Collection Tools**

Buegess (1999, as cited in Pathak, 2011) described that the three data collection tools in qualitative research are interview, participatory observation and document analysis. Accordingly, semi structured interviews, observation, document review and focus group discussion were employed to collect data for this study.

#### *3.4.1. Interview*

The central way in which a researcher achieves to perceive the understanding, feeling, and knowledge of people in a certain programs is through interview (Best and Kahn, 1993 as cited in Sosina, 2013). This interview was conducted using guided interview questions. The interview guide was systematically prepared and its appropriateness was tested before conducting the actual interview. Based on feedback obtained from the pretest, some adjustments were made to make it in line with the research objectives. The interview of three O-class teachers were recorded with their consent. The Other participants were not willing to record their interview using tape. As a result detailed note was taken during interview. On average each interview took one hour. In this study, interview was conducted with primary school directors, town education office ECCE experts and O-class teachers. These participants were selected because the researcher believed that they have information to describe challenges and opportunities of practicing O-class in Burayu town.

#### *3.4.2. Focus Group Discussion*

As the study was aimed at assessing the challenges and opportunities of O-class in Burayu town it was difficult to obtain detailed information with interviewing only teachers, directors and town ECCE experts. For this reason, the researcher prepared and tested the appropriateness of focus group discussion guide before conducting the discussion. Then the researcher conducted three focus group discussion on randomly selected parents in the respective school compounds to explore the general impression towards the O-class programme and other relevant affairs associated with O-class. Three focus group discussions were conducted at three different primary schools with O-classes. On average each discussion took one and half hours. In each group there were 8 participants. This implies that there were 24 randomly selected parents to participate in the study. Of the total 24 randomly selected parents, six of them were not participated in the discussions conducted at two schools. All the discussants were exclusively females.

#### *3.4.3. Observation*

According to P.V. Young (1977, as cited in Pathak, 2011), observation is systematic viewing, coupled with consideration of the seen phenomenon, in which main consideration is given the larger unit of activity by which the specific observed phenomena occurred. Koul (1996, as cited in Sosina, 2013) described that check list is a simple device consisting of items which are thought by

the researcher to be relevant to the problem being identified and researched. Hence using observation checklist, three primary schools with O-classes were observed by the researcher to collect and organize relevant data on key inputs and overall indoor and outdoor environment of the primary schools with O-classes and the classes. The researcher recorded information obtained through observation on the checklist and some points not addressed by the checklist were recorded. At the end, information obtained through observation were analyzed and crosschecked with those information from other sources.

#### *3.4.4. Document review*

Documents of Burayu town Education Office and the primary schools with O-classes participated in the study were reviewed and used as a source of data for this study. The documents reviewed were those indicating the number of children attending O-class in the schools participated in the study and other government primary schools with O-classes in the town. Documents indicating number of O-class teachers and their level of education and work experiences were also reviewed to collect information about O-class teachers.

### **3.5. Ethical Issues Related to Participants**

Data collected through interview, focus group discussion and observation were gathered with informed consent of participants. All the participants were personally contacted and discussions were held on the purpose of the study in order to make sure that the participants are willing to participate in the study. They were told that the information obtained from them will be kept confidential and can stop any time they feel uncomfortable for any reason and nothing harm them as a result. All interviews were held on with the agreement of the participants at time they feel comfortable.

### **3.6.Data Organization, Presentation and Analysis**

The data collected through above listed tools were organized, coded, described, conceptualized, classified, categorized and themes were identified based on research questions immediately after data collection. These data were analyzed using narration and the summary of the words of respondents.

## Chapter Four

### Result and Discussion

This chapter attempts to discuss the result of the data collected from parents of O-class students, O-class teachers, school principals and experts on preschool education in Burayu town. The results are presented in themes that emerged from analysis of data collected concerning challenges and opportunities of practicing O-class in Burayu town.

#### 4.1. Practices and challenges of O-class in Burayu town

##### 4.1.1. Profile of students attending O-class in Burayu town

It is obvious that children with different age groups have different developmental needs. Children should get learning and stimulating materials that are developmentally appropriate to their particular age group. Contrary to this, review of documents obtained from the primary schools with O-classes which participated in this study, and of those obtained from Burayu town Education Office, has pointed out that children in different age groups attended O-classes in government primary schools found in the town. It has also indicated that children aged 4 – 7 years attended O-classes in the government primary schools. For instance, 54% of students attending O-class in 2018/2019 were 6 years old, 25 % were 4 years old, 20% were 5 years old and the remaining 1% were 7 years old.

Primary school directors and O - class teachers, who were asked at which age children were expected to attend O – class, responded that *“children were expected to join O-class at age six, just a year before joining primary school. But, practically, children aged 4 – 7 years were attending O-class.”* Answering to the question as to why the schools were admitting students under and above six years old at the beginning of the school year, the school directors and O-class teachers revealed that *“they were admitting children under and above six years old to O- class due to high pressure and demand from parents.”* They also associated admission of children under and above six years old to O-class with their right to access to education. The researcher probed whether these students were grouped based on their age and learn in different classrooms accordingly. One of the school directors reported that *“all the age groups of O-class students in her school were learning in the same classroom due to lack of sufficient classrooms and trained O-class teachers.”* According to other two school directors, *“students attending O-class were*

*grouped into two classrooms based on their age i.e. students aged from 4-5 years old were grouped under one category to learn in the same class while those aged from 6-7 years old were grouped under another category to learn in the same classes but in different classes from the other age group.”*

Concerning whether 4 & 5 years old students were promoted to grade 1 or made to stay in O-Class after attending the class for a year, the participant school directors underlined that students aged 5 years and above promoted to grade 1, whereas those aged 4 years remained in O-Class for one more year.

Admitting students in different age groups to O-class is not in line with the Strategic Operational Plan and Guidelines for ECCE, which states that O- class is initiated principally to create access to education for those children who are disadvantaged and did not get a 3 years preschool education at six years old (MOE, 2010). Shaw (2010, as cited in Labuschagne, 2015), indicated that learners’ needs vary according to their age and ability. Teaching them in the same classrooms where the same educational materials and teaching methods are used cannot address the different developmental needs of children in different age groups. Categorizing and teaching children with different age groups in the same classroom may cause a negative effects such as high dropout rate, poor academic performance and development and display of undesirable behaviors in the schools and/or at home.

FGDs held with guardians/parents of O-class students in one of the primary schools with O-class disclosed that younger students of O-class were facing different psychological and physical challenges in the primary school under discussion. As a result, younger students who were attending O-class in the school have lost interest to go to school. This situation was understood to be contrary to the benefit of reduced dropout and repetition rate in primary education, which preschools in general and O-class schools in particular are supposed to have for children.

In regard to gender equity, data obtained from the town Education Office indicated that 38% of the total children attending O-class in 2018/2019 were female. This implies that still the number of girls attending O-class is less than the number of boys, and far lower than the target set in the ESDP V. Similar finding was presented by Woodhead (2017), where he observed that more boys than girls were attending O-class across preschool participated in the study.

Concerning economic status of parents of O-class students, focus group discussion conducted with parents of the O-class students indicated that they are from a community with low income. The O-class teachers also disclosed that most of O-class students lack adequate educational materials such as exercise books, pencils, erasers and etc. The students usually came to school without properly having their breakfast and had rarely something to test when came back to their home. Moreover, there were students who could not give duly focus on and attend their schooling because their parents were unable to feed them appropriately and regularly. As a result, the child who has gotten opportunity to develop mentally, socially and emotionally will fail to benefit from the accessed opportunity. This was found to have been affecting the effectiveness of the O-class program in primary schools with O-classes participated in the study.

#### *4.1.2. O-class Teachers' Training and Experience*

Teachers' training, experience and benefit play major role in delivering quality education for students attending schools in general and O-classes in particular. Moreover, the quality of early learning also depends on care and support provided to students attending the program. The National Strategic Operational Plan and Guidelines for ECCE (MoE, 2010) emphasizes on ability and skills of teachers to work with and/or care for younger children.

The O-class teachers were asked about their level of education and work experience when they were assigned as O-class teachers. Four of the respondent teachers reported that they were 10<sup>th</sup> grade complete with no teaching and other work experience when recruited as a teacher for O-class students but took a short term training on student centered teaching methodology. Two of the O-class teachers told that they had college diploma in language stream and had one and three years' of experience in teaching primary schools when assigned as O-class teachers. These two teachers didn't get any training related to O-class program. Review of documents of the town education office also indicated that majority of O-class teachers were 10<sup>th</sup> grade compete and had no any experience in teaching when they were assigned as teachers for O-class students. This finding is in line with Yigzaw & Abdurrahman (2017) and Girma (2014) who reported that the majority of the preschools in Ethiopia had no teachers with required qualification to teach preschools; but it is against Early Childhood Care and Education Strategic Operational Plan and guideline for Early Childhood Care and Education (MoE, 2010) which requires all preschool teachers to have

minimum Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education or have attended a 2 months course to upgrade their skills and knowledge, especially in the field of active learning of young children.

Lack of proper training will hinder the teachers from achieving the developmental objectives of O-class, which include fuller growth of a healthy body and emotional development; the development and use of language; the development of basic computational/arithmetic skills; personal, social and emotional development; the development of environmental knowledge; and the development of skills of creativity and a sense of appreciation.

During interview with school directors and town ECCE experts, they were asked why the town Education Office was not hiring qualified and certified teachers for O-class. The responses of the participants for the question is summarized as:

*It is very difficult to get qualified teachers on Early Childhood Care and Education in general and O-class in particular as there are few ECCE professional in the market. There are only few teachers training colleges in the region who train teachers in preschool education. Professionals trained in teaching preschool are highly requested by private preschools in the region. The town Education Office has no adequate budget to hire and assign these professionals as O-class teachers. These situation has forced the office to hire alternatively 10<sup>th</sup> grade complete and candidates who have diploma in language stream or science stream and develop their skills through training.*

This finding is in line with Educational Statistics Annual Abstract (2016) which found that 90% of preschool teachers in Ethiopia were in non-governmental preschools. This implies that teachers in the preschool sector prefer non-government institutions to government preschools due to low salary scale and benefit at the government preschools.

The Ethiopian School Development Program V (2015) mentioned the existence of this challenge and stated that College of Teacher Training (CTEs) will start a multi-year diploma specifically for preschool teachers to overcome this challenge. But it is very ostensible from the finding that huge gap exists in terms of meeting minimum required qualification for preschool teachers in general and O-class teachers' particular.

During classroom and playfield observation, the researcher was able to identify that O-class teachers' experience of applying active learning methods and play-based approaches were not to the expected standard. As observed, the focuses of the O-class teachers were on teaching the children formal/ academic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic exercises. The researcher was not able to observe teaching learning process that addresses fuller growth of a healthy body and emotional development; the development and use of language, personal, social and emotional development, the development of environmental knowledge and the development of skills of creativity and a sense of appreciation.

#### *4.1.3. Availability of Curricular and Other Necessary Teaching and Learning Materials*

Essential O-class curricular materials such as syllabi, teacher's guide, text books, and other related materials that serve as a cornerstone to guide children's learning are expected to be available in primary schools with O-classes and accessible to O-class teachers. However, analysis of responses of primary school directors and O-class teachers for a question, are basic curricular materials like syllabi, teacher's guide, text books for O-class available in your school, showed unavailability of these crucial and basic educational materials in the primary schools with O-classes participated in the study. The researcher probed so that the school directors and O-class teacher describe text books they were used to teach O-class students. The school directors and O-class teachers replied that *"text books borrowed from nearby private schools were used to teach O-class students."*

This finding is opposite to the finding of Rahel (2014), and Tsegaye (2014) where they had found most of government primary school use curriculum that is developed by the Ministry of Education. This contrast is may be due to the location of the study, both Rahel and Tsegaye conducted their study in Addis Ababa City Administration whereas this study was conducted in Oromia Regional State. This finding is in agreement with Temesgen (2016) where he had found similar finding with regard to unavailability of syllabus, curriculum and text books of O-classes in primary school with O-classes.

Another important question that O-class teachers were asked was to describe which level kindergarten books they were using to teach O-class students and whether the contents of the books address the developmental needs the children. O-class teachers from the first two primary schools with O-classes said that *"they were using Kindergarten two and Kindergarten three text books for*

*first semester and second semester respectively.*” But teachers from the third primary school with O-class said that *“they were using preschool three text books for both first and second semesters.”* O-class teachers from the three primary schools agreed that *“text books they were using were not in line with the syllabus prepared by Ministry of Education for Preschool program.”* This implies that lack of essential educational materials in the preschools with O-classes made the O-class teachers to depend on their personal experience and knowledge in selecting text books, contents, formulating learning objectives, selecting teaching methods and evaluating students. As a result, knowledge and skills O-class students will develop vary from class to class in the same school and from school to school.

During FGD, one of the parents of O-class students commented the teaching learning process in the primary schools with O-classes saying:

*Mucaan Koo egra mana barumsaa kana galee jijjirama gaarii fidaa jiraatuuyyuu gaaffiiwwan innii waa’ee biqiltootaa fi beyladootaa nagaafatu anumaafuu gaaffiidha. Gaaffii isaatiif deebii kennuufii yeroon dadhabu barsiistuun kiyya naloolti jedhee imimmaani isaa ofirraa yaasa. Ani akkan hubadheetti manni barumsaa kun biqiltootaafi beyladoota biyyaa kana keessaa hinjirree barsiisaa waan jiru natti faakkata.* This can be translated as: *my son has brought a great change since he joined this school. He frequently asked me about plants and animals which I did not know about them. When I failed to respond to his questions, he cried fearing the measures of his teacher. I understood that the school was teaching about plants and animals which are not familiar with the O-class students and probably not found in the country.*

This implies that unavailability of O-class syllabus, teachers guide and other relevant educational materials in the primary schools with O-class participated in the study brought a negative impact on O-class students’ learning process.

During classroom observation, the researcher critically observed and analyzed contents and lesson topics of environmental science text book borrowed from nearby private schools. The researcher found that some of the examples listed under plants and animals were not familiar with O-class students and difficult for O-class teachers to translate them in to local language.

#### 4.1.4. Availability of Guideline for Inclusion of Students with Disabilities to O-class

The Ethiopian government is committed to bringing all children to school following the philosophy of inclusive education. Inclusive education implies educational arrangements in regular schools, in and out of classrooms settings, that children and youth with special educational needs can be taught integrated with others with particular support provided according to their needs. To lead and guide inclusive education the Ministry of Education has prepared a master plan for special needs education.

During in depth interview, directors of primary school with O-classes were asked the availability and extent of implementation of guideline for inclusion of students with disabilities. Three of the primary school directors participated in the study said that *“except information obtained from the town Education Office orally there were no guideline for inclusion of students with disabilities.”* They also disclosed that *“due to lack of training for the school community on inclusion of students with disabilities, school community were not familiar with necessary supports to be delivered for students with disabilities and did not know how to deliver education for the children.”*

This finding is not in line with master plan of inclusive education MoE (2016) which set a goal to equip teachers and school leaders with knowledge and skills of special educational needs of children through training to better address special needs education and support.

During FGD with parents, one the discussant raised that their primary school and O-class was not providing education for students with disabilities especially students with visual impairments. She said that *“the son of her neighbor who was visually impaired repeatedly asked the school to admit him but the school was not willing to do so. As a result, he was referred to Bakko School of Students with Visual Impairments this year at his age of 15 years old.”*

This finding agrees with Education Statistics Annual Abstract 2007 E.C. (2014/15) which had found that out of 2.9 million children attending preschool only 4615 children with special educational needs were attending preschool through O-class and Child to Child Program. This deprived children with disabilities to learn different skills which are important for their primary education and future life such as Braille reading and writing, reading and mobility for students with visual impairments, sign language for students with hearing impairments and different life skills for students with intellectual disability.

#### *4.1.5. Site and Playground of O-class in Primary Schools*

Chowdhury and Choudhury (2002) stated that the site of Early Child Care and Education centers should be in the neighborhood of the children served. The ECCE centers should also be located away from crowded areas of the town, cemetery and main traffic areas for the purpose of children's safety. The Ethiopian School Development Plan V (2015) also underlined that school environment must be accessible, safe and healthy. However, observation of the researcher at the three sample primary schools with O-classes in Burayu town showed the classes in which O-class students learn and their playgrounds were near to main roads in two of the observed primary schools with O-classes. The playgrounds of O-class students were not smooth and had stones & broken woods in the two primary schools with O-classes. The physical environment of these preschools were not safe, accessible, and healthy. As a result, it did not support physical well-being, intellectual development, and social development of the children.

This finding is in line with Temesgen (2016) who found that safety conditions of playground of O-classes were poor for broken parts; stones, end edges and other unnecessary materials were found occupying many spaces.

FGD with parents of O-class students showed that many of 4-7 years old O-class students were expected to walk for more than an hour in a day to and from primary schools as the primary schools with O-classes were not in the neighborhood of the most of the target children.

#### *4.1.6. Indoor Environment*

Indoor materials and equipment are essential for implementation of Early Child Care Education program. The effective usage of these materials and equipment makes teaching learning process more tangible and easily understandable. Pairman and Terreni 2001 cited in Labuschagne 2015 stated that early childhood indoor environment can be seen as an additional teacher because it speaks to the learners and tells them what to do, how to do, where to do and how they can work together with other learners.

Observation conducted by the researcher at primary schools with O-class participated in this study showed that the schools were not properly equipped with indoor materials and equipment. The researcher observed that O-class students were sitting on over-sized chairs in some schools.

Children who sit on chairs with inappropriate sizes were feeling uncomfortable, of which some of them were even standing to see teachers and blackboards.

This result goes in contrast to Boren and Picket (1954, as cited in Meles A. & Kifle K. , 2017) who suggested that every room used by preschool should contain child sized chairs, tables and shelves. Child sized tables, benches / chairs and shelves give an opportunity for children to sit and work comfortably. Hence, the presence of these materials and equipment in preschool class rooms contributes to the achievement of educational objectives intended in the preschools.

In order to meet the needs of young children in O- classes, appropriate sizes of equipment, which are essential for the program such as tables, chairs, shelves and the class room sizes must be used. They must be comfortable for the students to sit and to change seating arrangements to apply different learning methods, afford an opportunity for children to sit and work comfortably. The inadequacy of the equipment, as in the some of observed primary schools with O-classes, tends usually to create discomfort and fatigue, which invite children to lack of attention and concentration to their own learning. It would also open the door for the occurrence of misbehavior. The inadequacy might also hamper the achievement of educational objectives intended in the O-classes

Concerning class room size of O-classes, the O-class teachers were probed whether the sizes of the rooms were in proportion with the number of children in the classes. The teachers from one of the primary schools with O-classes pointed out that the rooms in which O-class students were attending classes were constructed for classroom purpose. However, the classes were accommodating more number of students than the standards. Teachers from the other two primary schools with O-classes disclosed that the class rooms in which the O-class students were learning were not built for the classroom purpose. The number of students in the classes were much higher than the expected number of students to be accommodated. Observation conducted by the researcher at the three schools with O-classes identified that the number of O-class students pursuing their schooling in a single class was more than 64 and the class room space was inadequate almost for all observed O-classes.

This finding is in alignment with the findings of Sisay (2013) and Girma (2014) in which they reported that most of preschool classes were too small to accommodate high number of students and some classrooms of preschool students were constructed for other purposes.

Another important question that the O-class teachers were asked was whether the classrooms were appropriate for the teachers to apply different teaching methodologies such as group discussion, drama, game based learning etc. Majority of the teachers participated in the study disclosed that that the class rooms in which they teach O-class students were not convenient to apply different activity based learning in the classroom due to narrowness of the classes. During his observation, the researcher was also identified that teachers were not applying different activity based learnings due to unfavorable conditions in the O-class class rooms.

This finding was supported by Sisay (2013) who reported that most preschool classrooms were inappropriate to apply different active learning methods due to narrowness of the classrooms and poor classroom conditions.

#### *4.1.7. Outdoor Environment*

Archer (2007, as cited in Labuschagne, 2015) stated that young learners' outdoor play is limited by the new pressures and social conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now day's children spent their free time in house than outside due to parents' longer working hours, lack of close person who can look after the young children and small living spaces. These have led the parents' to utilize technology such as video games and television to keep children occupied. Limited access to outdoor play at home necessitates the importance of a suitable outdoor play area at school where learners have sufficient opportunity to play and run around (Monkfield Park, 2013 as cited in Labuschagne, 2015).

Cognizant of this fact, the researcher conducted observation at the three primary schools with O-class participated in the study and identified that the primary schools have separately fenced playground arranged for O-class students within the primary school compound though the fences were not strong and couldn't serve for the intended purpose. The researcher observed that there were outdoor play materials like marry go rounds, climbers, balance beams and swings in the

playground separated for O-class students but most of the outdoor playing materials were not functioning because of lack of maintenance.

This finding is in contrary with MoE (2010) which stated in the strategic document that outdoor play equipment must be well maintained, clean and developmentally appropriate that can provide ample opportunity for creativity and development of different skills.

The inadequacy of outdoor playing materials in the primary schools with O-class have a negative effect on physical, intellectual, creative, emotional and social development of the students. It limits children's opportunities to investigate and explore their environments, to learn to live with peers and to interact freely with materials & equipment available. It would also limit children's possibilities for play, to exercise and develop physical skills, to build self-confidence and competence, which are the main goals of preschool school education program.

Regarding the presence of separate toilet for O-class students, the researcher observed that the primary schools lack separate toilet for O-class students. He observed that O- class students share the same toilet with primary school students. The toilets lack potable water, were not child sized, not clean and couldn't invite students to use it. During FGDs with parents of O-class students, one of the parent said that *"I advised my daughter not to use school toilet because the size of hole of the toilet was not appropriate for the size of the O-class students and it has no water to keep its neatness."*

#### *4.1.8. Parents' Awareness and Participation*

Parents' awareness and participation in implementation of O-class program is very important for the schools and the children attending O-classes. To identify the extent of awareness of parents of O-class students about O- class program, they were asked what they knew about O- class, advantages of O-class for the students, change they observed on their children after joining O-class and where children of the community stay during their early age before the opening the O-classes in their surroundings.

The discussants explained that O-classes were opened for children from low income families who cannot send their children to private schools. According to the parents of O-class students participated in the FGDs, their children were very happy, active and became sociable since they joined O-classes. According to the participants, the O-class students also started singing songs that

they used to learn in the schools. Before opening of the O-class, children from the well to do families were pursuing their schooling in private schools whose monthly fee was not affordable for families with low income. As a result, children from low income families were used to stay at home before the opening of O-classes in the primary schools. The children who stayed at home manifested their emotion through crying and being unhappy while observing other children going to schools. The participants clearly pointed out that the opening of O-class in primary school found in their community has removed a great burden from their shoulder.

During FGD of parents of O-class students, the discussants were also asked the extent of their participation in O-class to improve the learning of their children. They revealed that though there were times when the schools call for meeting to discuss on the overall performance of the O-class students, very few number of parents were participating in the meetings. In depth interview with O-class teachers also showed that issues of academic performance of O-class students were left only for the teachers.

The FGD participants were also asked why parents of O-class students were not attending meetings organized by the schools. The participants disclosed that:

*Most of the time the schools were calling for meeting on Saturday or Sunday, the only day we use for different social purposes. On the contrary, one of the discussant said that -----  
Waggaa afuriin dura mucaa koo isa angafa baran manabarumsaa kana galchee teessoon daa'imman irra taa'an hinture. Hawaasa naannoo ijoollee isaa mana barumsaa kanatti barisifatuufi namoota abbaa qabeenya ta'antu teessoo bite ture. Dabalatanis yeroo sanatti mindaa barsiisotaa fi ijaarsa daree dabalatatiif mallaa buusaa turre. This can be translated as when O-class was launched in the schools participated in the study, there were no chairs, tables and other important educational materials in the school. In some schools additional class rooms were built through participation of the local community, chairs and tables were also purchased by the contribution of the local community. The salary of O-class teachers were also paid for the first two years by the contribution of the local community.*

This implies that awareness of the local community including parents of the students attending O-class on importance of O-class program was very high. But due to the less attention given to the

participation of the local community by the school in O-class program, it was found that their participation was very low.

This finding was supported by Temesgen (2016) who found that in most of preschools students follow up is taken as teachers only responsibilities.

#### *4.1.9. Budget allocation*

Allocation of budget for certain activity implies extent of focus given to the activity or the program regardless of importance of the program or activity. During in depth interview, the school directors were asked whether the local government allocate sufficient budget for O-class program.

All directors of primary schools with O-classes participated in the study underlined that the local government did not give due attention to O-class program. As a result, no budget was allocated for O-class program of primary schools participated in the study. According to the school directors, the primary school were forced to host the O-classes from their scarce budget. As a result, the schools were unable to fulfill necessary indoor and outdoor materials for students attending O-classes.

The school directors and ECCE experts were asked why the local government was not willing to allocate budget for O-class program. The school directors and ECCE experts replied that *“We have been asking this question since the commencement of O-classes in our schools. The response we get from the Education Office and Office of Finance and Economic Development of the town was the absence of separate budget for the program.”*

This find exactly agrees with many researchers findings for instance Belay (2016) and Temesgen (2016) in which they found that the primary schools that operate under serious budget and logistic constraints were expected to host O- classes.

#### *4.1.10. Administration of O - Class*

Students perform better where the school directors provide strong leadership. This is because effective leaders are visible, able to successfully convey the school’s goals and visions, collaborate with teachers to enhance their skills and are involved in the discovery of and solutions to problems. However, in depth interview with the primary school directors participated in this study showed that the O-class program has been suffering from lack of its own administration. From its

beginning, the government gave its administration to primary school directors who were busy with the primary school assignments. This has contributed a lot for the O- class teachers not to get necessary support they require even at the school level. The school unit leaders also did not give attention to the O- class program because they were busy with assignments related to primary schools. This clearly indicates that O-class program has no its own administration who fully engaged in leading and supporting the program to achieve its goal. Probably all challenges of the O-class program arises from lack of good administration at different educational office levels.

This find is in line with Belay H. (2016) in which he found that the very existence of the O-class program doesn't seem recognized which can be manifested through lack of administration lay out and others.

#### **4.2. Opportunities of O-Class Program**

To understand the opportunities that O-class program has, the school directors and O-class teachers were asked a question to describe opportunities that O-class program have. Per teachers of O-class program and school directors, the major opportunities of O-class program are connected with the focuses that international communities and the Ethiopian Government gave attention for early childhood care and education. The Ethiopian Government has shown its commitments to expand and improve the quality of early childhood education program in its ESDP-V (2015-2020) with special focus on O-class program. Regardless of its small number, the government has started training teachers for the program in some Teachers Training Colleges.

According to the O-class teachers and school directors, other opportunities of O-class program are parents' awareness about the importance of the program and great demand of the local community for the O-class program. The local community understood the importance of O-class program for children who did not get opportunity to attend a three years KG education. Therefore, these factors will contribute a lot for sustainability of the program.

## Chapter Five

### Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This chapter deals with summary of the research findings, conclusions reached, and recommendations made.

#### 5.1. Summary of Findings

The main purpose of this study was to assess challenges and opportunities of practicing O-class in Burayu town. In order to achieve this purpose the following basic questions were formulated;

1. Who are the children attending O- class?
2. To what extent trained human power are assigned for O- class?
3. Is the school environment conducive for students attending O- class?
4. Are the necessary teaching and learning materials available for O- class teachers and students?
5. What is the extent of engagements of parents in O- class?

In dealing with the basic research questions, qualitative research method was employed and relevant literature was reviewed. Data were collected using in depth interview, focus group discussions, observation and document analysis. The participants were O-class teachers, directors of primary schools with O-classes, town ECCE experts and parents of students attending O-classes.

Three primary schools with O-classes were selected by purposive sampling method because they have more experience in implementing O-class than others. Six O-class teachers were selected from the three primary schools with O-classes by purposive sampling method. On the other hand, parents who were participants of FGD were selected by random sampling method from the list of parents.

Data obtained through interview, observation and focused group discussion was analyzed using narrative description or qualitative method.

The major findings of the study have been presented below in the form of answers given to the basic questions.

### 1. Profile of Students Attending O-class

Analysis of data obtained from participants and document review indicated that children of age 4 – 7 years old were attending O-classes in the primary schools participated in the study. In 2018/2019 academic year, the percentage of girls attending O-class was found to be 38% which is smaller than by boys 12%. It was also found that children attending O-classes were from parents' with low economic status. This study has also found that the O-classes were not inclusive for students with disabilities.

### 2. Assignment of Trained Human Power for O-Class

The analysis of data collected from O-class teachers, primary school directors with O-classes and Burayu town ECCE experts showed that adequate qualified O-class teachers were not assigned to the primary schools with O-classes under study. 10<sup>th</sup> grade complete with short term training and diploma holders in language stream with no preschool trainings were assigned as O-class teachers for the schools participated in the study. The number of O-class teachers were also found to be lesser compared to the number of students attending O-classes in the primary schools with O-classes participated in the study.

### 3. Convenience of O-Class School Environment for O-Class Students

The researcher's general observation of the sampled three primary schools with O-classes in Burayu town and analysis of data obtained from participants showed that the playgrounds identified for O-class students were not at appropriate site and not conducive for the students in general and students with disabilities in particular. It was also found that there were no clean, neat and child sized toilets in the primary schools participated in the study. The toilets had no potable water points. Regarding outdoor materials, it was found that the three primary schools with O-classes almost have worthless merry go round, balance, ladder or Seesaw.

This study also found that there were no child sized appropriate chairs, tables and shelves in the primary schools participated in the study. Moreover, the study found there were no sleeping/rest rooms for students attending O-class. The schools understudy were not accessible for most of the target children due to its long distance from children's residence areas.

#### 4. Availability of Educational Materials for O-Class Students and Teachers

The study found that there were no crucial and basic educational materials like curriculum, syllabus, text books, teachers' guide, story books and other teaching aids in the primary schools participated in the study. As a result, the O-class teachers taught their students using developmentally and culturally inappropriate materials which were borrowed from nearby private schools.

#### 5. Extent of Participation of Parents of O-Class Students In Supporting Implementation of O-Class

Analysis of data obtained from participants indicated that the awareness of parents about the importance of O-class was very high. It was found that parents' involvement in bringing and taking students to and from the school was high. However, the participation of parents in improving academic performance of the students was found to be low as it was left only for the teachers.

In general, the study pointed out that the major challenges of implementing O-class program in Burayu town were:

- Inadequacy of trained O-class teachers;
- Low salary and benefit for O-class teachers;
- Attendance of different age groups of O-class students in the same class;
- Absence of curriculum, syllabus, teachers' guide and text books for O-class teachers;
- Inadequacy of standardized class rooms;
- Inadequacy of appropriate indoor and outdoor playing materials;
- Lack of rest rooms;
- Lack of water and child size appropriate toilets;
- Inaccessibility of the school environment for students with disabilities;
- Lack of on job training for O-class teachers;
- Lack of adequate budget
- Low participation of parents in improving academic performance of O-class students and
- Lack of its own administration.

On the other hand, the study has pointed out that some of the opportunities of implementing O-class in Burayu town. These are:

- Presence of policy framework for implementation of O-class;

- The beginning of O-class teachers training at various College of Teachers' Training and
- Increased parents' awareness about the importance of the program and their high demand for the program.

## **5.2. Conclusions**

The Ethiopian Government has introduced O-class in 2003 E.C. or 2011/2012 G.C as a new initiative to enroll children who did not get access to attend a three year preschool. Despite the introduction of the program, its quality and accessibility for children who did not get access to attend a three year preschool education was very low compared to number of children expected to attend O-class. From the above findings and discussion the following conclusion were drawn.

The physical environment of the O-classes were not conducive for the students. The playgrounds identified for O-class students were not at appropriate site and not conducive for the students to play in general and students with disabilities in particular. The O-classes lack clean and child sized toilets, potable water and rest rooms. Most of the outdoor playing materials of the O-classes were not functioning and were inadequate for students attending O-classes. With regard to indoor or classroom materials of O-classes, most of the O-classes lack appropriate child sized chairs, tables and shelves.

Concerning availability of educational materials and its implementation, it was found that there were no crucial and basic educational materials like curriculum, syllabus, text books, teachers' guide, story books and other teaching aids. As a result, the O-class teachers taught their students using developmentally and culturally inappropriate materials borrowed from nearby private schools.

The awareness of parents' of O-class students about the importance of the program was found to be high though extent of their participation in improving academic performance of the O-class students left for the teachers alone.

With regarding to the assignment of trained human power for O-class, the schools lack trained and qualified teachers.

It is obvious that the challenges listed above hinders achievement of objectives of O-class program in the primary schools participated in this study.

### **5.3.Recommendations**

Based on the above findings and conclusions the following suggestions and recommendations are provided to manage the challenges and advance the practice of O-class in the town.

- 1) To address the developmental needs of different age groups of students, the government needs to elongate the duration of O-class from one year to two years.
- 2) The government needs to build the capacity of Teachers' Training Colleges so that they able to admit more number of candidate O-class teachers.
- 3) Burayu Town Education Office need to organize ongoing workshops, seminars, conferences, and trainings to enhance the professional competence of O-class teachers.
- 4) Burayu Town Education Office need to provide an opportunity for O-class teachers to be trained in preschool education in general and O-class in particular during the summer seasons.
- 5) Burayu Town Education Office need to allocate sufficient budget to fulfill indoor and outdoor materials for O-class program.
- 6) Burayu Town Education Office need to identify appropriate site for O-class in the primary schools
- 7) Burayu Town Education Office need to build primary schools with O-classes near to the residence areas of the target children.

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## Appendixes

**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Education and Behavioral Studies**  
**Department of Special Needs Education**

### **Interview Guide for “O” Class Teachers**

**Dear participants:** This interview is designed to assess the current practices of “O” class in preschools of Burayu Town. Your responses will be kept confidential and used for this research purpose only. The success of this study to a great extent relies on your genuine responses. Hence, you are kindly requested to be honest in your responses to all the questions.

**Thank you in advance!**

#### **A: Background Information**

1. Gender-----
2. Have you trained in Early Childhood Education? -----
3. Have you received in service training on ECCE? If yes for how long? Who provided you?
4. What is your level of education? -----
5. How many years work experience do you have before starting teaching in “O” class? -----  
-----? Is it in teaching or other fields? -----
5. For how many years have you thought in “O” class? -----

#### **B: Issues related to instructional material**

1. Is there “O” class educational manual in the school?
2. Have you ever gotten an access to it?
3. Is there “O” class Syllabus/curriculum guide/ in the school?
4. Are there text books for “O” class students? If no skip to # 9
5. If there are text books, which subject text books are available?
6. What is the ratio of students to text books?
7. Are there teachers guides for “O” class teachers?
8. Which subject teacher guides are available in the school? What is the ratio of teachers to teachers guide?
9. Are there different teaching aids for “O” class students?
10. If there are no text books, what do you use to teach the students?

### **C. About Parent Involvement**

1. Do guardians of “O” class students ask feedback about their child’s learning?
2. Does the school facilitate discussion time for guardians of children from “O” class? How many times per year?
3. Do you think that parents of “O” class students have awareness about the importance of “O” class?
4. Do you think that the government has given due attention to “O” class? Why?

### **C. About physical environment of the School**

1. Do “O” class students have separate play ground? If no where do they play?
2. Are there outdoor playing materials for “O” class students? If no, how do they spend their play time?
3. Is there separate toilet for “O” class students? If no do they share with primary school students?
4. Is there water near the toilet? If no, where do children wash their hands after toilet?
5. Are there in door playing materials for “O” class students? If no, how do they spend their play time?
6. Are there chairs for “O” class students? Are the chairs appropriate for the physical size of “O” class students?
7. Are the equipment and furniture in the class movable and flexible to apply different sitting arrangements in the class?
8. Is the environment flexible to accommodate children with special needs? If no what do you do if students with special needs come to register?
9. Is number of students per class in proportion with the class size?
10. Are the classes ventilated well?

### **D. Age of students attending “O” class**

1. At what age children are expected to attend “O” class?
2. Is the age of children attending “O” class in you class in line with this? If no why?

### **E. About opportunities of “O” class**

1. To what extent are you satisfied to teach “O” class students in this school? Why?
2. Do you think that there is an opportunity for “O” class? What do you think are the opportunities?
3. Any other comment you have about “O” class?

Thank you for your time!

**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Education and Behavioral Studies**  
**Department of Special Needs**

Interview for Primary School directors and Burayu Town ECCE experts

**Direction**

This interview is designed to assess the current practices of “O” class in preschools of Burayu Town. Your responses will be kept confidential and used for this research purpose only. The success of this study to a great extent relies on your genuine responses. Hence, you are kindly requested to be honest in your responses to all the questions.

**Thank you for your cooperation!**

Date .....

Time started.....

Time ended .....

1. What do you think are the main objectives of “O” class?
2. Do you think that necessary instructional materials were provided for “O” class students and teachers?
3. What supports are provided for “O” class by:
  - A) Local community?
  - B) Parents of students? Do you think that parents have enough awareness about “O” class? Do they participate in a meeting organized by the school?
  - C) Education office of the town
  - D) Town Administration office?
4. Do you think that adequate trained human power assigned for “O” class? If no why? If yes what is the average ratio of teachers to “O” class students?
5. Is the physical environment of the school such as:
  - A). Playing field
  - B). Toilet
  - C). Chairs etc. conducive for “O” class students?
6. Are there adequate playing materials for “O” class students? If no, how they spent their play time?
7. What do you think are the opportunities of “O” class?
8. Does the town administration allocate budget for the “O” classes?
9. Do you have any additional comment about “O” class?

**Thank you for your time!**

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**College of Education and Behavioral Studies**  
**Department of Special Needs Education**

**Focus group discussion guide to be conducted with parents of “O” class students**

**Dear participant:**

This discussion is designed to assess the current practices of “O” class in preschools of Burayu Town. Your responses will be kept confidential and used for this research purpose only. The success of this study to a great extent relies on your genuine responses. Hence, you are kindly requested to be honest in your responses to all the questions.

**Thank you in advance!**

Date ..... Time started.....Time ended .....

**I. Knowledge about “O” class**

1. What do you know about “O” class?
2. Do you think that it is advantageous for children? What are the advantages of “O” class?
3. What changes did you observe on your children in the areas of education, play, social interaction?
3. Where children of the community stay before the opening of this “O” class?

**II. About stakeholder Involvement**

1. Does the school facilitate discussion time for you and other guardians of children from “O” class? Have you ever participated on the discussion?
2. What are the roles of local community in ensuring quality of “O” class? How the communities participate?
3. Do you think that the local government has engaged in supporting “O” class?

**IV. About physical environment of the School**

1. Does the school have separate play field for “O” class students? Is it conducive for “O” class students?
2. Are there separate toilet for “O” class students? Is there water near the toilet? Is the toilet conducive for the children?

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**Observation Checklist**

Name of the school-----Date of observation -----

Time of start----- Time of end-----

**A. Document Review for presence of instructional materials**

No.	Document to be observed	Present	Absent	Remark
1	Education and Training policy			
2	“O” class Syllabus/curriculum guide/			
3	Text books for “O” class students?			
4	Teachers guide for “O” class teachers?			
5	Different teaching aids for “O” zero class students			
6	Guideline for children with special needs			

**2. Physical Environment of “O” class**

No.	Physical environment to be observed	Yes	No	Remark
1	Is the playing field appropriate for “O” class students			
2	Are there separate toilet for “O” class students			
3	Is there water near the toilets			
4	Is there first aid kits in the schools			
5	Are there balances			
6	Is there Merry-go-round			
7	Are there foot balls			
8	Are there slides			
9	Are there skipping roles			
10	Are there Large and mobile toys			
11	Is the building of the class rooms attractive for kids?			
12	Are there different pictures drawn on walls of class room?			
13	Are the chairs movable			
14	Are the sitting materials in size of the children?			

15	Can the environment accommodate children with special needs			
16	The toilet floor is conducive for children with special needs			
17	The toilet floor is washable and not slippery			