

Early Childhood Education Practices: The Case of Akaki Kaliti Sub City

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DECLARATION

I declare that **Early Childhood Education Practices: The Case of Akaki Kality Sub City** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Girma Sileshi entitled: Early childhood education practices and challenges in Akaki Kality Sub City of Addis Ababa and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of, Degree of Master of Arts (Educational Research and Development), complies with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ACRONYMS

ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EFA	Education for All
ICDR	Institute of Curriculum Development and Research
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
KG	Kindergarten
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAEYC	The National Association for the Education of Young Children
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
REB	Regional Education Bureau
SSA	Sub Saharan Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the basic processes of kindergartens in Akaki Kaliti Sub City of Addis Ababa from the perspectives of the practitioners. Its ultimate purpose was to advance knowledge on the sector and convey this understanding to practitioners and policy makers in order to take timely corrective measures. The study tried to pinpoint the major challenges encountered in the process, sort out best practices and suggested solutions to problems. The research was guided by interpretivist paradigm employing qualitative research approach. Preschool teachers, principals, experts, and parents were interviewed; the schools settings observed, and relevant documents analyzed. Participants' selection was based on the rich information individuals acquired to fully answer the basic questions of the study. The data collected from the above participants were coded, categorized under recurring themes and interpreted accordingly. Hence, the study found out that achievement of holistic development of children in the schools was based on teachers understanding of how to implement the curriculum and the schools orientation to satisfy the 'owners'. The study also revealed low commitment of the government to promote preschool education. Generally, I conclude that the practices of preschools in Akaki Kaliti are different across schools and individual teachers depending on the understanding and motivation of teachers and orientation of the schools. It is recommended that preschool should follow unified curriculum that can enhance the holistic development of the child. In this regard, implementation of the preschool curriculum should be strictly monitored and technically supported by the government. Provision of the curriculum and teacher's guides should also be available to all (government, private, community, etc. preschools) without preconditions. Moreover, adequate budget should be allocated to preschools and the manpower needs and motivations of Sub City Education Offices need to be revisited.

Key words: *early childhood education, kindergarten, preschool practices*

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Early childhood is a period that ranges from birth to entry into primary school. Although there is no agreed age range for this specific period of children development, the most widely accepted view is from birth to eight years. Programs in early childhood period may include basic health and nutrition interventions; parenting programs; and various centre-based activities, ranging from crèches for very young children to pre-primary schools that lay the foundations for primary schooling (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2006).

Early childhood is a unique period of development that shapes the personality of the child. Studies in child psychology reveal that the development of intelligence, affectivity and social relations occur very rapidly in the early years of a person's life (Evans & Gruba 2000). The early years of child development are very important not only because they lay the basis for human development, but also because any experiences a child is exposed to during this time have a lasting influence in adulthood. As such a person's future potential is better exploited when proper attention, care and support are accorded as early as possible in one's life.

The Ethiopia Education and Training Policy also stated that the pre-primary education helps the children to get ready for primary school and the program takes three years. The education programs given to these levels would enable children to express their feelings, investigate their environment and learn numbers (MoE, 1994).

Similarly, The Education Sector development Plan IV (ESDP IV) (2010) put early childhood care and education as one of the priorities for the education sector due to its potential inputs to the overall improvement of the quality of education and reduction of dropouts and repetition rates in the later stages of primary schooling (P.15).

However, implementation of the programs was weak and there were also wide variations among countries. For example in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) region the overall enrollment rate for preschool in 1999 was 16.3 percent. Compared with other countries, SSA lags behind countries in other parts of the world in preschool coverage. In this same year, the average preschool GER of countries in the Middle East was 28.8 percent, Asia's GER 36.5 percent, in both Eastern Europe and Central Asia 59.5 percent and Latin America and the Caribbean 62.8 percent (Jaramillo & Mingat, 2008, p.54). Similarly, Sudan had a preschool GER of 22 percent in 1999, while Ethiopia's was only 1.7 percent (p.51). Five years ago, in 2009, the Ethiopian GER for kindergarten was only 4.2 percent (MoE, 2009). Nowadays, the preschool enrolments in Ethiopia reach 26 percent (MoE, 2013). This achievement was mainly through various interventions.

The Ministry of Education (MoE), (2013), categorized pre-primary education into kindergartens, "O" class and child-to-child programs. The above achievement was due to the establishment of "O" class in the premises of the primary schools, particularly in rural areas. Although the quality of these interventions is beyond the scope of this study, it has created tremendous access to the pre-primary school age population of the country.

In Addis Ababa, there were quite a number of kindergartens run by both government and non-government actors. In 2011/2012 alone there were about 1,013 kindergartens creating access to 126,221 children (61,769 girls) (MoE, 2012). Thus, the study was conducted on kindergartens aiming at assessing the practices and problems that influence the implementation of the pre-primary education program in Akaki Kality Sub City Addis Ababa.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The early childhood years set the foundations for life. This period of development is worth studying due to various factors. Among the widely accepted factors UNESCO (2006) stated the most salient five. First, it sets the foundation for life. Scholars underscored the poor adjustments made by individuals to their environments are due to lack of proper stimulation and support during the early years. Second, it is a period of rapid brain development that lays the foundation for later learning (Curtis & O'Hagan, 2003). Scientific studies revealed that the parts of the brain and neurological pathways that influence health, learning, and behavior are all substantially influenced by proper sensory stimuli at early ages (Young & Mustard as cited in Garcia, Pence, & Evans, 2008, p.73-74). Third, it contributes to the EFA and MDG goals. Fourth, it provides essential support for working parents, particularly mothers, and finally, investment in ECCE yields very high economic returns, offsetting disadvantage and inequality, especially for children from poor families.

In realizing this fact societies had different arrangements for taking care of and educating young children depending on family and community structures, and the social

and economic roles of men and women (Blumberg as cited in UNESCO, 2006). For example, in Ethiopia children from birth to three years are usually raised at home by their primary caregivers, usually mothers and/or relatives. In most cases, extended family members including siblings were responsible to take care of and stimulate the child. When the child reached four, it is believed ready for schooling. Some children joined the nearest priest/Koranic “schools” to learn oral literacy or stay at home until seven years, which is the proper school age for formal primary schooling (Tirussew, 2005). Recently, I have also seen such experience while I was a schoolteacher, a principal and an education program coordinator in different parts of the country.

The current social and economic trends are disrupting many of the existing child care arrangements. According to UNESCO (2006), urbanization, work-driven migration and the increasing participation of women in the labour market are transforming family structures. These and the ‘big push’ from the formal education sector that presupposes readiness of the child for formal schooling have led to engage children in pre-primary education everywhere. As a result, private investors, non-government organizations, and the government are involving in preprimary education all over the country.

In Addis Ababa, quite a number of kindergartens operated by non-governmental organizations such as communities, private institutions, and faith-based organizations.

About 90% of the Kindergarten enrolment in 2005 E.C. (2012/13) was covered by non-government organizations (MoE, 2013). On the contrary, there were lots of complaints from the government, parents, and educators on different issues.

Studies on preprimary education by post graduate students (Dangea, 2008; Bezunesh, 1986; Adane, 2008; Tirussew, 2005) identified gaps on implementation of the curriculum, material and facility, teachers' competence, textbook production and usage, and the language of instruction as major concerns. However, the studies were non-comprehensive, some of them very old that did not show the current practices, and usually quantitative in nature. I believe there is a real gap to surely say about the current practices of kindergartens in Addis Ababa. Hence, I enthusiastically interested to assess the current practices of ECCE in Addis Ababa, around Akaki Kality Sub City from the perspectives of the practitioners, using qualitative research methodology.

Therefore, the study attempted to answer the following basic questions.

1. How do teachers in preschools/kindergartens implement the curriculum to realize holistic development of the child?
 - a. Is the learning environment (indoor and outdoor facilities) appropriate and adequate enough to pursue kindergarten education?
 - b. How effectively do parents and preschool teachers interact to advance children's learning and development?
 - c. Do the sample kindergartens have adequate number of teachers with the necessary competence to implement the curriculum?
2. Do kindergarten teachers employ teaching methodologies appropriate to children age, developmental level and local context?

3. How do kindergartens evaluate and assess children progress?
4. What are the major challenges that hinder preschools in Akaki Kality from achieving their purposes?

1.3. Objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate the basic processes of kindergartens in Akaki Kality Sub City of Addis Ababa from the perspectives of the practitioners and the associated challenges encountered in order to sort out and share best practices and suggest solutions to problems. Its ultimate purpose is to advance knowledge on the sector and convey this understanding to practitioners and policy makers in order to take timely corrective actions. Specifically,

1. Assess the implementation practices of the preschool curriculum from the perspective of the different providers (government, private and NGOs)
2. Examine the assessment techniques preschool teachers employed in evaluating children's performance in the schools
3. Find out adequacy and appropriateness of the learning environment in the schools.
4. Assess the adequacy and competence of preschool teachers to implement the curriculum.
5. Identify the interactions among teachers, children and parents in advancing children's holistic development, and

6. Identify the major challenges that hinder preschools in Akaki Kality from achieving their purposes and suggest solutions.

1.4. Significance of the study

Early childhood is an important period of development that sets the foundation for life. Although the period is fundamental and important, the priority given to the sector was low as the 'sector was left to private individuals and communities' (MoE, 1994). Recently, the government is strengthening the sector through different interventions. Some of the supports provided include development of policy frameworks, strategic guidelines, ECCE standards, curriculum guides, and technical support. Therefore, the study will have a number of significances both for policy makers, practitioners, and parents as described below.

- ✓ It may show direction to policy makers where the gap lies so that intervention of the government and practitioners is possible,
- ✓ It may allow practitioners to share best practices and understand the underlying factors to improve their processes
- ✓ It informs parents about the importance of investing on children and enable them understand their role and the role of others on children development and learning.
- ✓ It may serve as a base for further research on the area of kindergarten education

1.5. Delimitation of the study

The period of early childhood ranges from birth to age eight. Early childhood programs may include basic health and nutrition interventions; parenting programs; and centre-based activities (UNESCO, 2006). Although it is worth to study early childhood education in its entirety, my focus was delimited to center based activities, particularly kindergarten education of 4-6 years of age children. Likewise, Akaki Kality Sub City consisted of 111 kindergartens during the year 2013/14. Among these, the study considered only three of them so as analyze the schools deeply through qualitative research approach.

My study was also delimited to assessing the appropriateness of preschools learning environment, interaction of parents and preschools, adequacy and competency of teachers, appropriateness of the teaching methodologies, evaluation and assessment of children progress and the major challenges encountered in preschools.

1.6. Organization of the study

Following the introductory chapter, a brief survey of the relevant scholarship is presented in Chapter two. A full explanation of the study's design and methodology appears in chapter three. The fourth chapter is dedicated to results of the study. Finally, chapter five deals with the discussions, limitations, recommendations and conclusions of the study.

2. CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This section briefly goes into the historical evolution of early childhood education, the theoretical frameworks underpin the study and the major findings of different studies related to preschool education practices and challenges.

Reviews of the scholarship on the topic enabled me to identify five prominent themes on the practices of kindergarten education from both developed and developing countries. In broad terms, these issues are concerned with implementation of preschool curriculum, infrastructure and materials, professional competence and role of teachers in realizing preschool curricula, parent-teacher relationships, and assessment techniques to identify children talents and assess performances.

2.1. Historical evolution of early childhood education

Ancient Greeks are believed beginning early childhood education. Particularly Athens and Sparta's are pioneers in the field. The ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle were very much interested in children and have influenced child rearing and learning practices. These philosophers emphasized on play and punishment as means of shaping children (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000).

Pre-primary education program was introduced in America in 1955 by Mrs. Carl Schurz, a student of Frobel (McCarthy, 1980). Later, the program was introduced to Africa through voluntary organizations (UNESCO, 1991).

The early childhood education was introduced in Ethiopia since the advent of Christianity, in the form of priest schools. Zara Ya'aqob was one of the activists in

promoting traditional church education in the 16th century (Demeke, 2007). According to (Hoot et al., 2004), the first modern preprimary education was built in Diredewa in 1900 to teach children of the Ethio-French rail way line workers. Later on, lots of pre-primary schools were attached to formal educational institutions like the German school, the British school, and Lycee Geberemariam. These schools were serving children of affluent families.

The expansion of the pre-primary education was so slow that from 1908 to 1974 there were only 77 pre-schools in which 7,573(0.22%) children out of 3.5 million were attending the pre-primary education program (p.4). The socialist movement of the 1974 Dergue Regime was the turning point for the growth of pre-primary education in Ethiopian history. Teacher training institution, curriculum development and text books preparation departments, and teacher education, supervision and evaluation of pre-school program were formed with the assistance of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education to satisfy the growing demand of early child-hood education program (Demeke, 2007).

Nowadays, pre-primary education took three forms: kindergarten, "O" class, and child-to-child programs. Consequently, more than 2 mln (26%) of four to six years old children population are benefiting from the program (MoE, 2013). Addis Ababa, among the major beneficiaries regions from the pre-primary education, comprises 126% of the GER (p.21).

2.2. Theoretical framework of the Study

Children between ages 4 and 6 are more physically mobile, ready to form relationships with adults outside the family, and have sufficient language and cognitive development to engage in active interactions outside the home. This maturity favors center-or community-based programs (UNESCO, 2006). However, children development is influenced by the interaction of innate and environmental factors. Although how much can parents, teachers and others support a child's development is not known scientifically, their contribution to a child's development is evident (Curtis & O'Hagan, 2003).

In order to say children develop fully, the five key domains should be addressed: physical - related to basic needs and development of gross and fine motor skills; cognitive which is related to cognitive functions like perception, communication, and information processing; academic which is a capacity to learn from formal and informal educational opportunities; emotional – concerned with awareness of feelings and enhanced ability to self-regulate emotions; and finally social which deals with personal identity, interpersonal relationships, and awareness of self in relation to social structures and norms.

In order to address these domains theorists have developed various theories concerning children's growth, development, and education. Among these the prominent five are discussed below.

Arnold Gessell, who developed maturationist theory, designed extensive set of tests and measurements to assess and describe children in ten major areas of development. His

view was that children's inner abilities, rates of development, and behavior in the ten identified areas were genetically determined. This meant that each child developed, matured and learned according to his or her own internal maturational schedule. Children were masters of their own educational process and could thrive on their own within a supportive environment (Davies, 2008; Burke, 2000).

Behaviorism, advocated by B.F. Skinner and Albert Bandura, is a perspective in which the environment is regarded as the single most important variable in shaping children's development and education (Davies, 2008; Burke, 2000). Behaviorists believe that learning occurs in small steps moving from simple to more complex actions. Skills are acquired piece by piece cumulatively. All children are capable of increasing their skills and abilities when exposed to external stimuli in the appropriate setting. No allowance is made for individual differences in style and pace of learning.

Social learning theory, on the other hand, advocates children's primary mode of learning occurs through observing and imitating others in the immediate environment. Unlike social learning theory, humanistic perspective, emphasize on children's natural curiosity, passion for learning, and active imaginations. According to the proponents of this view, these endowments should be valued and supported by democratic classrooms (Davies, 2008; Burke, 2000).

The other contemporary theory of learning is the constructivist view advocated by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Constructivist theory is by far the most influential of all on contemporary early childhood curriculum development and practices. According to this theory, children are viewed as active agents in the construction of their own knowledge,

based on prior learning combined with teacher-facilitated experiences (Burke, 2000; Brostrom, 2006). The importance of play is a significant feature of the constructivist approach (Davies, 2008).

Early childhood is a complex stage of development that can be influenced by a number of variables. Because of that, there is no one single theory that overshadow on the others In terms of children learning and development. I believe a combination of the theories may apply for the purpose of this study.

2.3. Preschool Curriculum

The primary purpose of the early childhood curriculum is to provide a 'blueprint' or 'master plan' of the why, what and how of care giving and teaching based on a philosophy of how children develop and learn. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines curriculum as "an organized framework that delineates the content children are to learn, the processes through which children achieve the identified curricular goals, what teachers do to help children achieve these goals and the context in which teaching and learning occur" (NAEYC, 1991).

The effective curriculum provides specific guidance that gives clear direction to the user but allows for flexibility in adapting to special situations as needed. A written curriculum document generally incorporates the guiding philosophy of the program; goals, learning objectives and desired outcomes for children's development; teaching/learning activities incorporating appropriate content knowledge; examples of supporting resources; assessment strategies; and guidelines for planning the learning environment and relating positively with children (Davies, 2008).

The design and development of the Ethiopian preschool curriculum acknowledges the importance of play to curriculum practice, allowing children to be active learners, interacting with a wide variety of materials and engaging with learning centres in the process. Varied approaches to play and child-centered methods of learning are encouraged. Learning is guided by planned, integrated curriculum with identified developmental outcomes that are age and stage appropriate and take into account the development of the “whole” child (p.6).

2.3.1. Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum and Practices

2.3.1.1. Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum

Developmentally appropriate curriculum refers about curriculum planned to be appropriate for the age span of children. Curriculum is a guide. Once the teacher engages with children, he will learn more about the individual children within the group, the curriculum might change drastically. Curriculum should be driven by the different needs, levels of functioning, and interests of the children in the group (Miller, 1996).

From the point above, having a good curriculum alone is not enough to guide the teaching learning process in the schools. An experienced and qualified teacher with good knowledge of children development and contextualizing skill is a must.

When planning developmentally appropriate curriculum, all aspects of development need to be taken into consideration (p.5). Planning for the development and education of the whole child means that children will not become “specialists” in the areas of language or social development. It means that children will be encouraged to develop evenly across all areas of development.

Developmentally appropriate curriculum focuses on integrating learning rather than departmentalizing learning. Children learn through interaction with children, materials, and adults. In developmentally appropriate curriculum, children learn through direct experiences not by learning about persons, places, and things from someone always telling them about them. In a developmentally appropriate environment, children learn science, social studies, language arts, and math through reading books and listening to stories, engaging in sensory experiences, participating in cooking experiences, being involved with art activities, taking part in dramatic play, using manipulatives, taking field trips, building, creating, and sharing all of these experiences with their peers and the adults in their classrooms (Miller, 1996; Jackman, 2001).

Developmentally appropriate curriculum and practice has two dimensions: age appropriateness and individual appropriateness. Age appropriateness refers the knowledge whether materials, equipment, or curriculum content is right for children. This requires a strong knowledge of child development. When an individual teacher knows about the typical physical, social, emotional, language, and cognitive development of children, then that teacher will understand what needs to go into the framework of an age-appropriate classroom and age-appropriate activities. A teacher who does not have command of this information will have difficulty with planning and implementing activities that are comfortable for children while still encouraging them to grow and develop.

Individual appropriateness is to understand the uniqueness in each and every child. The number of children in a classroom means the amount of uniqueness that the teacher

should be cautious of the situation. Therefore, an early childhood teacher should know that each day in a preschool classroom is a challenge that needs to be solved systematically and professionally. Teachers must observe children in their classrooms under a variety of conditions in order to learn about the children and their special ways of doing and learning (p.2).

2.3.1.2. Thematic curriculum

The term “thematic approach” is currently used widely in the field of early childhood education (Seefeldt as cited in Miller, 1996). Thematic curriculum is curriculum that focuses on one topic or theme at a time. Thematic curriculum is a vehicle for managing curriculum while achieving developmental appropriateness (p.32).

Each theme developed allows the activities and concepts planned to integrate all learning opportunities for the children for whom the curriculum is planned. Children at differing stages of development approach concepts from different levels. They bring different experiences to the activities provided for them. A developmentally appropriate curriculum is neither child directed nor teacher directed but a result of interaction between teachers and children, with both contributing ideas and reacting to them to build on meaningful themes (Cassidy & Lancaster, 1993, p.31-32).

In determining appropriate themes for children, the teacher give activities and thoroughly observe every child how s/he chooses activities, reacts, etc. and base his curriculum on that. However, encouraging the development of a well-rounded child who delights in learning of all kinds should be the goal of an early childhood educator. To assure this idea, Miller (1996) stated, “The children are a source of curriculum but

only one of the possible sources. Teachers are the stage directors while the children are the models and co-players. The teacher as the responsible adult is the organizer, who sets the stage, times the acts and holds it all together (p.35).”

In a nutshell, developmentally appropriate practice focus on curriculum, adult-child interaction, relations between home and program and developmental evaluation of children, which collectively form the basis for a comprehensive framework to the critical components of early childhood curriculum and practice.

2.4. Child development and learning

Children have variations in their development and their development defines the process for learning. Jackman (2001) put developmental levels of children with specific to each age range. The section below discusses fours, fives and six year’s old children development levels independently and the influence on the processes for learning.

According to him, four year olds are full of enthusiasm and high energy. They are able to do more things without help, have greater self-confidence and enjoy learning to do new things. However, they like to have an adult’s attention. This group can use a higher level of language (more and bigger words) than they really understand (p.5).

Essa as cited in Jackman (2001) explains, “Peers are becoming important. Play is a social activity more often than not, although fours enjoy solitary activities at times as well.”

Teachers of this age group need to answer frequent children’s questions and assist them on trying to find many things that they can do. Teachers should vigilantly observe these children and set up the environment to match their skills (p.6).

Five-year-olds are more social and also enjoy playing with small groups of children. The use of language, especially vocabulary, continues to grow along with the understanding that words can have several meanings. They are more self-controlled. Family and teachers can have the most influence on how they behave. They are able to take responsibility very seriously and can accept suggestions and initiate action. This group of children can run, jump, catch, throw, and use scissors, crayons, and markers easily. Exploration of the environment is important to these children. They act on their own and construct their own meaning. Understanding of rules, limits, and cause and effect starts to develop. The teacher's role is to allow all this to happen, while at the same time creating the appropriate environment, encouraging curiosity, and learning along with the children (p.7).

Six-year-olds are able to think and learn in more complicated ways, both logically and systematically.

The language and communication development is dramatic. They move from oral self-expression to written self-expression. Bredekamp and Copple as cited in Jackman (2001) stressed "children's receptive vocabulary increases not just by listening but by reading too and their expressive vocabulary expand from spoken to written communication" (p.7). They become more independent and have strong feelings about what they eat, wear, and do. Curiosity increases and they actively look for new things to do, to see, and to explore. They make new friends, and these peers play a significant role in their lives as they take into consideration the viewpoints of others. Seefeldt and Barbour as cited in Jackman (2001) emphasized, "They're developing the ability to see things from

another perspective and are able to be more emphatic. At the same time, they're very sensitive and their feelings get hurt easily (p.7)." Teachers' and parents' should give proper guidance, affection, encouragement, and protection.

2.5. Infrastructure and Facilities

Arranging appropriate indoor and outdoor areas in an early education program is significant to curriculum development. The arrangement requires planning for each individual child and group of children, understanding the prior experiences and development of the children.

2.5.1. Indoor Environment

Children in a classroom setting need to feel that they belong. The environment should tell the children "we care about you." For example, every child should have a personal space or "cubbie" with his name or photo. The characteristics of a responsive, organized classroom offer a variety of well-defined learning centers, sometimes called interest centers or activity centers, where materials and supplies are combined around special groupings and common activities. These centers support children's learning and enable them to explore, experiment, and interact with the environment at their own rate of development.

Arranging and organizing the space for preschool classes becomes more specific and complex. The following learning centers are suggested for early education classroom areas: books; language and listening; dramatic play or home living area; art center; sensory activities with manipulatives; woodworking; cooking; water, sand, and mud play; blocks; music and movement; science, discovery, and nature; Math; Social studies;

computers, etc. 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, visuals rich in color, etc. It should also be friendly, providing adequate opportunity for interactions among children as well as between children and adults (p.53). However, continuous introduction and rotation of new materials stimulate interest. How many of the areas are used at the same time depends on the schedule, the number of children in a classroom and the support teachers have by their assistants and many other factors.

The clearly arranged spaces assist children in setting their own pace, making choices that will help them to be more self-directed, which in turn will improve their self-control.

2.5.2. 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 (p.54).

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 (p.40-41).

You 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. McCracken as cited in Jackman (2001) advises, "Outdoor time requires adults who are playful, have sharp senses and quick reactions, and who will closely observe children. Save reading, resting, parent conferences, team meetings, and even casual conversations with other adults for more appropriate occasions. Your attentive eyes can prevent an injury (p. 36-38)."

2.5.3. 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, p.65).

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.

Well-stocked cabinets in an early childhood classroom filled with the latest and best materials should not be misconstrued as the one sign of developmentally appropriate, integrated curriculum. 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 (p.66).

2.6. Preschool teachers

2.6.1. Qualification and experience of teachers

The Strategic Operational Plan and Guidelines for ECCE (2010) clearly puts teachers of kindergarten 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” (p. 56). Teaching methodology in these schools necessitates child-centered approach with the children actively involved in the learning process.

2.6.2. Role of Teachers

The teacher should take different roles in the school in order to achieve the objectives of the school. Among the major roles of the teacher in an early childhood education are facilitation, participant in activities with children, communicator of parents, and encourager of engagement of all children (p. 56). S/he is also responsible in managing

the environment (Jackman, 2001). As a facilitator s/he should be “role model” for children in any of his/her activities with children. The teacher also needs to “engage in activities with children” rather than presenting how something should or must be done. Teacher as “communicator of parents” is the most important role of teachers in order to get the confidence and the support of parents (Miller, 1996, p.70-76).

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. Gordon and Williams Browne as cited in 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 (p.34). 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.

Jackman (2001) emphasized appropriateness to remind children of the rules in a simple, clear, and reasonable way for the age of the child and listen when they express their feelings and frustrations. Whenever possible, it is good to explain the reason for the rule. For example, “The water stays in the water table so the floor will not be wet. Someone could fall on the wet floor (p.35).”

Many times children experience intense and dramatic emotions. A part of early education management is to help children deal effectively with the outward expression

of their feelings. A teacher need to help the individual child identify what he is feeling, place a limit on his behavior, and give the child an appropriate outlet for that feeling. For example, "I know you are angry with him, but I cannot let you hit him. You may hit the play dough instead." "Use your words to tell her how you feel (p.34)."

A teacher should model how to explain children's behavior to each other. "I think he wants to play with you." "I think she needs to play by herself for a while." A preschool teacher uses suggestion or redirection rather than the word *don't*. It is helpful to say "Sand stays in the sandbox," rather than "Don't throw the sand!" Teachers need to tell children what is expected of them in a positive manner. In dealing with children, it is normal to observe mishaps as a natural part of a child's day. If water spills over the table, it is good to say "please get some paper towels to clean up the water" and "I'll help you clean that up," you preserve a child's self-concept while allowing her responsibility for herself (p. 34-35).

Since the teacher is the one to develop, implement, and evaluate what occurs in his or her own classroom, s/he should be in the right place at the right time in order to see what is and what is not working. The teacher is right there to encourage, modify, support, assess children, and evaluate the success of the curriculum while it is ongoing.

2.7. Assessment

Assessment is the process of observing, recording, and otherwise documenting the work children do and how they do it, as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect the child. Assessment should not be a reflection of inherent capacities, but of

individuals' interactions with the environment and their emerging capabilities that capitalizes upon the strengths of the learner.

The following methods of observing and recording are often used in the assessment processes of preschools: anecdotal record, checklist, case study, reflective log or diary and portfolio assessment (Jackman, 2001). Early childhood professionals strictly emphasize that assessment of children's learning should be appropriate and authentic that involves little or no standardized testing.

2.8. Parent teacher relationship

Parents are the child's first and most important teachers. Engaging families impacts not only the life paths of the children and families, but also the well-functioning of early childhood centers. Family engagement is usually considered in terms of negotiating conflicts between home and school; frequent two-way communication; parents' participation in program decisions about their own children's care and education; the sensitivity of educators as they respond to parental choices and goals; sharing of information; engaging parents in the planning for their own children; and linking families to services (Copple and Bredekamp as cited in Ben-Avie, 2010, p. 87-88).

Hence, there should be strong partnership between early childhood practitioners and the parents for the greater benefits of the child (Davis, 2008, p.6). According to Jackman (2001) teachers have responsibility to keep the lines of communication open to families. It is also the family's responsibility to be involved with their child's teacher and school (P.77-78).

However the relationship might not always be positive due to various factors. Boutte, Keepler, Tyler, and Terry as cited in Miller (1996) review effective techniques for involving “difficult” parents who exhibit any of the following behaviors: antagonism; “know-it-all” manner; frequent complaints, negative behavior; shy or unresponsive behavior; and illiterate behavior. They pointed out that “developing an authentic relationship with each parent” goes a long way to ease difficulties (p.351). Jackman (2001) provided some suggestions for communicating with parents in an institutional setting. These include providing daily or weekly children report, call for parent meetings, encourage parents to share with you what they know about their children, visit the classroom, conduct parent-teacher conferences that focus on the accomplishments and needs of the individual child, provide multilingual written communications as needed, and provide opportunities for parents to volunteer (p.18).

3. CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A research design, according to Mouton (2000), is determined on four basic dimensions: the purposes of the research, the theoretical paradigm informing the study, the context where the research will be carried out, and the research technique used to collect and analyze data.

The main purpose of the study was to advance knowledge on early childhood education practices in Akaki Kality Sub City of Addis Ababa. In essence, the study has three major objectives: kindergarten teachers' practices to implement the curriculum, adequacy and appropriateness of the materials and equipment, and the interactions among teachers, children and parents. The study also tried to identify the challenges encountered in the process.

3.1. Research Design

The study was governed by the interpretivist paradigm using basic qualitative studies design and methods as presented by Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter, (2006). One-on-one interview and observation guide were the primary sources of data collection. In addition, the preschool curriculum guides, text materials, student assessment forms, student report cards, parent teacher communication book, and preschool schedules were also reviewed.

3.1.1. Rationale for the Selection of the Research Design

Since the study required the necessity of generating rich and meaningful information based on participants' perceptions, I investigated the problem using naturalistic

paradigm and qualitative research approach.

Likewise, interpretative paradigm involves taking people's subjective experiences seriously by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they tell us. This world view makes use of qualitative research techniques to collect and analyse information (Ary et al., 2010). It tried to engage in an open-ended, inductive exploration made possible by basic qualitative studies (Joubish et al., 2011; Ary et al., 2010).

One-on-one interviews were administered inside the kindergartens settings with the consent of the institutions in order to understand the experiences of study participants from the context. Observation and review of relevant documents were also done to triangulate and supplement the interview data. The data collected were transcribed, coded, categorized under recurring themes and interpreted.

3.2. Selection of the Study Setting

The study was carried out in Akaki Kality Sub City of Addis Ababa. The selection of Akaki Kality Sub City was due to the proximity to my residence and the rapport I had with many of the schools and the Sub City Education Department. I thought this would give me better access to information than any other sub cities. The kindergartens selection was based on purposive sampling technique, specifically maximum variation sampling. According to Schreiber and Asner-Self, (2011) maximum variation sampling is more suitable when you choose participants or sites that are very distinct or different as related to your phenomenon of interest.

From informal discussion and visit with some of the kindergartens before the actual

research, I realized that private kindergartens carried out their duties somehow differently from their government and faith-based counterparts. Therefore, the selection of specific kindergartens was based on the type of kindergarten (government, private, NGO assisted) in order to get rich and specific experiences on the practices of preschool education. Accordingly, the researcher, in consultation with the sub city preschool education expert, purposefully selected three kindergartens that could provide rich information and volunteered to participate in the research process. I deliberately used pseudonyms as I promised to hide the real name and address of the schools. Hence, the three study schools were named School 1, School 2, and School 3. The study participants were also given names of Principal 1, Teacher 1 and Parent 1 for the participants from School 1; and Principal 2, Teacher 2, and Parent 2 for the participants from School 2; and Principal 3, Teacher 3, and Parent 3 for study participants of School 3.

The next step in the research process was review of the scholarship in defining what basic issues to look for and the sources of the data. Accordingly, the school curriculum, materials and facilities, student assessment procedures and forms, the type and level of interaction among children, teachers, administrative staff and parents were identified as major contents. The kindergarten principals, teachers, parents, classrooms, curriculum guides, text materials, parent teacher communication books, student report cards, and facilities have also been identified as the major sources of data. The table below shows the profiles of the selected schools.

Table 1: Profiles of the study sites

S / N	Name of Kindergarten	Type of kindergarten	# of children in 2013	Teachers qualification								# of section	Remark
				Certificate		Diploma		Degree		Other			
				M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
1	School 1	Private	368	-	1	1	11	-	9			11	
2	School 2	Others	159		6							3	
3	School 3	Gov't	34								2	1	

3.3. Participants Eligibility Criteria

The purpose of the study and the crafted research questions demanded participation of kindergarten principals/directors, teachers, preschool education experts, and parents of children in the study. The eligibility of individuals to serve as participants in the study was determined by the individuals' responsibility assigned in the school/office, the rich information they have to inform the study, the years of child teaching experience. Parents' selection was based on the presence of child/children in the specific kindergartens under study.

Table 2: Profiles of the study participants

S/N	Name of Institution	Type of Institution	Type and number of participants involved in the study								Remark	
			Principal		Teacher		Preschool		Expert	Parent		
			M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
1	School 1	Private	-	1		1	-				1	
2	School 2	Others		1		1					1	
3	School 3	Gov't		1		1					1	
4	Sub City							1				

3.4. Construction of the Sampling Universe

According to Mouton (2000), the decision about ‘how many cases is enough’ depends in part on how much detail one is likely to gather in each case, the degree of theoretical development in the field being studied, i.e. strong body of existing theory, the type of the project (exploratory, pilot project or plans to be a definitive study in an area), and the constraints imposed on the researcher by budget and deadlines (p.289).

I decided to take few cases (ten) based on the reasons below. The topic under study has rich body of knowledge and the issue has been studied by many researchers. I have also tried to capture as detailed information as possible through one-on-one interview that

has taken from forty five minutes to 90 minutes per participant coupled with days of observations. Besides, the limited time and financial resources I had were the reasons to suffice the number of participants to ten.

Closely looking into the characteristics of the kindergartens, I found out that, principals/directors work both as teachers as well as heads of the kindergartens. Therefore, I included all the three preschool/kindergarten principals as key informants for my one-on-one interview. Moreover, three experienced preschool teachers (who worked three years and above in that specific school) were included in the study. One preschool education expert and three parents were also part of the research. The principals and the sub city preschool education expert were selected purposively as they are the key authorities to provide adequate and appropriate information on the research topic.

After interviewing the principals, I asked them to recommend other teachers to be involved in the study. Hence, three teachers were proposed by the principals taking their experiences and work performance into account through network/snowball sampling technique. Like the teachers who were recommended by the principal's, parents' involvement was also proposed by teachers using snowball sampling technique (Mack et al., 2005; Creswell, 2007, 2012, p.259). However, convenience/availability sampling technique has been considered where the proposed parent was unable to show up.

Involvement of parents in the study was to find out the extent of relationship between teachers and parents and identify the factors that hindered from creating smooth

interaction with the schools. A total of ten study participants were interviewed and audiotaped with consent.

3.5. Role of the researcher

As Creswell (2007) stated, although qualitative studies utilize a broad range of information gathering techniques, at bottom, the researcher is the “primary instrument of data collection and analysis”. In the study, I was doing all the interviews, observations and document analysis in order to understand the preschool practices and the associated challenges from the research setting. I had tried to see the experience of the participants from their point of view, rather than superimpose my own experience and/or opinions upon them (p.38).

3.6. Methods and Procedures of Data Collection

The primary data collection methods were interview, observation and document analysis (Mack et.al, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). The principal data-gathering instruments for the study were an author-constructed one-on-one interview and observation guide (adapted from the book “Early Education Curriculum: A Child’s Connection to the World (2nd ed.)” by Jackman (2001), and document analysis. The interview questions were designed in a way that can answer the basic questions of the research.

The observations used in the study were both participant and nonparticipant observations depending on the type of activity observed and the setting (Hatch, 2002; Creswell, 2012). According to Schwartz and Jacobs in Hatch (2002), the goal of

observation is to understand the culture, setting, or social phenomenon being studied from the perspectives of the participants. Hence, the observation guides focused on the kindergarten settings and classroom teaching so that I could observe and easily capture relevant issues related to appropriateness of the kindergarten compound to children, availability and adequacy of facilities and the overall interactions, i.e. child to child, teacher to teacher, student to teacher, students to administrative staff. With consents of the concerned persons in the kindergartens, I took pictures and videotaped teaching learning processes, and materials and equipment in the two kindergartens in order to get balanced view of the audio recordings during the interview process.

The document analysis was focusing on analyzing the curriculum guides, textbooks (where available), parent teacher communication books, student report cards, and student assessment forms the institutions employed.

3.7. Data Management

All the interviews were conducted in the participants' respective settings and the interviews were audiotaped. During the interview, probing techniques were used wherever I thought the responses of the interviewees were not adequate or if there were follow up issues that required further clarifications. The interview proceeded on major topical domains to allow thematic responses emerge from the data itself. By using observation guides, I observed the kindergarten campuses, classrooms, lounges, rest rooms, play grounds, offices, staff rooms, bathrooms, clinics, and the interactions among the school community (students, teachers, and administrative staff). The observations were done alternatively as participant and non-participant observer

without interfering the normal functioning of the school. After certain events like student arrival, student departure, recess, classroom teaching, mealtimes and snacks, toileting, etc., I sat alone and check the relevant points and take descriptive and reflexive field notes. The document analyses were done looking the relevant documents to ensure availability, quality, effectiveness, and utilization. Similarly, I took field notes during the document analysis phase as deemed necessary.

As described by (Onwuegbuzie, 2007), constant comparison analysis was used to analyse the data. The data collected were transcribed, read and reread, coded in two to three words, categorized under recurring themes, integrated and interpreted(Hatch, 2002; Ary et al., (2010); Strauss & Corbin as cited in Joubish et al., 2011).

The data analysis started immediately after the first interview and observation and continued until the end of the writing process (Maxwell, 2005). It was done by organizing and integrating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, and make interpretations(Strauss & Corbin as cited in Joubish et al., 2011).

3.8. Informed Consent and Other Ethical Considerations

Babbie (2008) in his book “The Basics of Social Research” exclaimed the importance of ethics in social research. Social researchers need to clearly inform participants the purpose of the research, the possible risks and losses they may incur as a result of their involvement before they are involved in the research. Besides, they should also know, it is their rights to answer/not to answer any question and withdraw from participating in the study anytime.

Since the study involves revealing personal practices and opinions of teachers, principals and parents in which their responses might be public, requesting informed consent of the study participants for voluntary participation was mandatory. Hence, before I conducted the interviews, I clearly explained the purposes of the study and confirmed verbal consent of their participation in the study. I had also acknowledged it is the right of the participant to answer/not to answer questions or withdraw anytime from the study.

In qualitative study, the data collection is done by interview, where anonymity is impossible. As Babbie (2008) noted, a researcher collects the information from an identifiable individual. To solve the issue, I made sure not to use participants' real names, names of institutions and addresses public. I consistently used pseudonyms in this report for all the study participants and kindergartens. Besides, all information gathered through original fieldwork has been maintained in a safe and secured place. The participant's actual full names and locations were maintained in password protected folder accessed by the researcher alone. Hence, I would like to confirm that the names of schools and individuals in this report are not real names but rather fictitious names given by the researcher in order to hide the actual names of the study schools and individual participants.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data from the three kindergartens as presented by the ten study participants. The experiences participants shared communicate to the reader the multiple practices and experiences employed by the kindergartens.

The results are presented in themes that emerged from the data analysis: holistic development of children; assessment practices; parent teacher interaction; indoor and outdoor spaces; teachers' role, qualification, and experience; teaching learning processes; and awareness on preschool education.

The findings are presented using the participants' words and descriptions. Each presentation begins with a theme grounded in the data

4.1. The setting

The study was conducted in Akaki Kality Sub City of Addis Ababa. The sub city is found in the southern periphery of Addis Ababa. Akaki Kality bordered with Oromia Regional State towns in the south. It has an estimated population of 195,273 settled on 118.08 square kilometers. The sub city is divided into 11 districts. The study covered three of the districts, one kindergarten from each.

School 1

School 1 is government supported kindergarten established in 2003 E.C. It is an extension of a primary school. It is managed and administered by the primary school

principal. Since it has no budget allocated from the government, solely depends on the will and generosity of the primary school support.

Both the primary school and the kindergarten share the same gate. The school compound is very large, about a hectare, and one might reach the school buildings after walking nearly 300 meters. The preschool building is found to the left of the primary school delineated by corrugated iron sheet.

The Kindergarten compound looks like inverted L-Shape. The longer side has accommodated the one-story kindergarten building leaving the opposite side for children flag ceremony. The other end is left for outdoor playground. The school accommodated 159 poor family background children of ages three to six years. Although the school has many vacant rooms that can accommodate additional children, due to shortage of teachers and meager recurrent budget, it serves very limited children.

It has one office and staff room, three classrooms, and one sleeping room usable at the moment. The playground is equipped with different outdoor services: marry-go-round, seesaw, swings, and slide. Many of the equipment are not properly anchored and one of the swings abandoned for fear of causing injury on children.

School 2

School 2 is among the big schools in the sub city established in 2001 E.C. The school compound is fenced high with masonry and partly with corrugated iron sheet. The

compound is approximately 60 meters long and 50 meters wide. The gate is about thirty five meters from the tip of the compound protected by a gatekeeper. When the gate is opened, the left and front sides are piled with classrooms. To the right side of the gate, one kindergarten classroom, the office, and sleeping room are lined facing towards the front side classrooms. In the middle you will find a classroom and dining room (for nursery children) conjoined back-to back facing to east and west respectively. Between the middle block and the office, there is an open space used for kindergarten children dining. The open space has no walls but the ceiling is covered with corrugated iron sheet.

Approximately more than one third of the space is devoted to playground. It has different child friendly playing equipment: slide, see saw, merry-go-round, and plastic hoops. All the materials are made of sturdy plastic and anchored well in the ground. The equipment are different sized that suit children at different age group and developmental levels.

Classrooms are organized based on age groups: four to six years are grouped under kindergarten in three levels (one to three). The classrooms are also arranged and decorated according to these classifications. The lower group, kindergarten one, usually focus on playing. The higher levels, Kindergarten two and three, in addition to play, they also learn literacy and numeracy.

In the current academic year, 2006 E.C., the school caters for 368 students from nursery to preparatory (Kindergarten three). The children are from diverse ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

School 3

School 3 is an NGO supported kindergarten. It is found around the outskirts of Akaki Kality Sub City of Addis Ababa. The school is established and managed by NGOs, international and local NGOs respectively. The international NGO provides the fund and the local NGO implement the program.

The school is situated in the rural areas of the sub city and serves poor rural children that have little choice of schooling. The learning center was rented from farmers of the surrounding area. The room was totally intended for residence so it is beyond the design for schooling. In the year 2014 (2006 E.C.), the school is serving 34 children. There are two teachers hired and paid by the NGOs to handle these children. Since it is a one classroom school, the teachers employ multi-grade system of teaching. The students are grouped according to their age and specific tasks will be provided to each group. Wherever necessary, the whole group taught together. The school has adequate materials and equipment to support the teaching learning process. The playground has different outdoor equipment made of locally available materials.

In a nutshell, the study revealed that the settings of the three kindergartens were quite different in terms of the localities where the schools are in, the socioeconomic background of parents, the ownership of the kindergartens, and qualification and

experiences of the teachers. These differences had influence on the practices of the kindergartens. The impact has been seen on the use of the curriculum, parent teacher interaction, and teaching methodologies of teachers.

The following were details of the results of the study grouped under major themes and subthemes.

4.2. Curriculum usage

In the joint policy framework of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (2010), kindergartens in Ethiopia are designed to foster “holistic development of the child” (p.16-17). The preschool program is prepared for the acquisition of basic skills (pre-reading, pre-writing, pre-counting and pre-arithmetic) in preparation for the child’s formal schooling. Self-regulation, intrinsic learning motivation and the ability to cooperate with other students are among the social-emotional competences that children may gain from attending preschool. Despite the complexities of this stage of children development, there are no clear guidelines on how to effectively implement kindergarten education both at government as well as non-government levels. The government has left the responsibility to kindergartens, particularly, preschool teachers. Taking this issue as a major point for discussion I posed question to preschool principals and teachers that “what was the purpose of the kindergartens of Akaki Kality Sub City?

All the study participants agreed that preschools work for the ‘development of the child’ but the emphasis and the way they realize holistic development of the child somehow

differs individually from one teacher to the others and institutionally from one school to the other schools depending on the experiences of the teachers and the orientations of the schools.

Interviewer: what are the major themes provided in your school to enhance development of the child?

Principal 1 stressed, “we focus on the four ‘development domains’, i.e. physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of the child as set in the preschool syllabus. The Sub City Education Office has provided us syllabus and curriculum guides to follow and use. By using the teachers’ creativity, we try to enhance holistic development of the children.

The major themes of the preschool are: “ለተገቢው እድገትና የአካል ጥንካሬ ተገቢውን እንክብካቤ ማድረግ፣ ተቀባይነት ባለው መልኩ ከሌሎች ጋር ግንኙነት መፍጠር፣ ቋንቋን በአግባቡ መጠቀም፣ በእለት ተዕለት እንቅስቃሴ ውስጥ የሂሳብ ስሌትና ፅንሰ ሃሳብን መጠቀም፣ and ከአካባቢ ጋር በሚፈጠር መስተጋብር አካባቢን ማጥናትና በአግባቡ ማጣጣም.” However, these themes are general guides that should be modified to children’s experiences and development level. She further explained, “For example, if the topic I teach is ‘to identify fruits through the sense organs’, I use lemon in which my children might have experienced rather than mango or orange which other teachers might use. Considering the context is solely left to the teacher (Field notes, April, 2014).

However, Principal 2 said,

We focus on the overall development of the child. But more emphasis is given to cognitive skills of children.” Usually teachers from their experience and

other schools experiences identify major contents for children and revise the syllabus at the end of the academic year regularly. This is a customary practice in the school and I found it very helpful and made the school competitive in the market. The government syllabus and curriculum guides have important elements in terms of teaching methodology rather than content and usually take the methodologies and songs. The school has its own textbooks/workbooks that can be used by children at all levels (KG 1 to KG 3). The subjects for each level differ according to children development levels. Subjects in kindergarten one include Amharic, English, Math, Math in English, and Art. In kindergarten two; Amharic, English, Math, Math in English, Science, and Hand writing are thought as subjects. Kindergarten three (preparatory) classes have Amharic, English, Math, Math in English, Science, Moral, and Hand Writing (Field notes April, 2014).

I probed the head teacher “why the school uses a different approach?” and Principal 2 further explained:

The government curriculum totally focusses on ‘playing children’. As a private school, we try to fulfill the requirements set by the government but did not strictly follow the themes developed by the government. We have prepared text materials that serve as textbooks for KGs. These textbooks are developed by teachers which will be revised at the end of the academic years to include and/or exclude items relevant for the children. Sometimes we see other kindergartens textbooks and foreign country experiences, like India. By using these materials

through play based approaches, we are able to satisfy our clients' interests, parents, and develop the holistic development of our students (Field notes April, 2014).

Principal 3 stressed the program intends to develop the child to its fullest potential. The school uses the government curriculum and curriculum guides. Specifically, there are five major themes that can be adapted and contextualized by the teachers, the themes are similar to School 1 above, (Field note April, 2014).

Parents of children were also interviewed about their children learning and development in the respective kindergartens. Parents' were more interested about results than the processes, i.e. to see their children able to sing songs; read and write letters, words, and sentences; speak English; see observable changes of behavior; etc.

I asked Parent 2, a mother of twins, who sent her children to School 2, why she sent her children to this school and the children's learning and development.

I had no opportunity to get modern preschool education during my childhood. Nowadays, there are no priest schools on the one hand and formal schools require children to identify letters and numbers as prerequisite. So, as a parent, it is foolish and unwise for me to keep my kids at home until seven years. The problem is the choice of schools. I prefer the private school due to their feeling of responsibility and the results I see on my children. I could see my neighbors children who are grade three and four who cannot read and write let alone at Kindergarten level. You know! I have two kids attending kindergarten three, if I am not exaggerating; they better read and write than the grade three

and four students. Private schools, although you need to be selective, are more reliable and responsible for children (Field notes, April, 2014).

For the question above, my interview with Parent 1 from School 1 says I send my child to this school mainly for two reasons: affordability and freedom to work.

Unlike the private schools, I am not asked to pay for my child schooling. It also keeps my child for long hours so that I can work and earn my living without much worried to my child. Besides, the school sometimes provides food which I could not get in other schools. The teachers are like parents, they take good care of him; teach him good manners, songs, and letters. He sings for me and read the English and Amharic alphabets (Field notes, April, 2014).

From the dialogue above, I can say that parents rate effectiveness of schools from cognitive development, care and safety, and future employment of children.

In general, the implementation of the preschool curriculum was done in different ways. Although all the study schools emphasize on the child's holistic development, the way schools tried to realize holistic development of the child were different. Thematic approach of the government curriculum and curriculum guides were used in the two schools (School 1 and School 3) while independent annual plan of action and textbooks was used by the other school (School 2).

4.3. Indoor and Outdoor Spaces

This section revisited the implementation of the curriculum from kindergartens indoor and outdoor services. Arrangement of appropriate indoor and outdoor environment in

an early education program is significant to promote children's learning, comfort, health, and safety (Jackman, 2001, p.53). A child-centered early education environment focuses on children playing and learning. Children acquire the skills, concepts, and knowledge of the curriculum through rich and varied interaction with peers, teachers, and materials.

4.3.1. Classroom organization

Classroom arrangements and materials directly affect children's learning and self-esteem. A developmentally appropriate classroom should give children the opportunity to select activities that are interesting and meaningful. The learning centers allow children to create situations using both the real world and their fantasy world to solve problems and express creative ideas. The selection of open-ended materials for these centers encourages children to freely explore, experiment, and create (Jackman, 2001, p.53).

With this view in mind, the following narration was based on the classroom observations in the three kindergartens using the study's observation guides.

The classrooms of School 1 were arranged taking children's age and developmental level into considerations. The classrooms were furnished with child sized chairs and tables. The walls of the rooms were decorated with letters, words, numbers, models, etc. The classroom space was divided into different corners comprising both real and fantasy world materials like sensory manipulatives, sand and mud, puzzles, wood working, math, language, science, books, blocks, art center, dramatic play, music, nature, home living area, etc. so

that children could choose, explore and interact with their own pace of development. During my classroom observation, I noticed engagement of children in different activities they liked and activities provided by the teachers. Some children were immersed in the activities they were doing, others competing in a “let me do it” way and still others were idle due to lack of appropriate guidance from the teachers. In this class the problem was the number of students (there were about 50 students). The teacher and her assistant were busy with providing guidance and direction to children (Field notes, April, 2014).

Classroom arrangement in School 2 was a little bit different. My observation field note unfolds;

Classrooms were furnished with child sized chairs and tables. The walls and ceilings of the rooms were decorated with letters, words, and numbers. The walls were given names based on subjects: Math, Amharic, English, and Science walls. The ceilings were covered with “students’ wishes” children’s names printed on them. The rooms had one shelf each used for storing children exercise books. The rooms were not standard sized for classroom purposes as they were built for other purposes. Because of that many of the materials like sand, wood working, puzzles, blocks, art center, dramatic play, etc. were stored in one wide room haphazardly. According to the head teacher, children come and manipulate these materials occasionally as per their schedule.

Generally, the classrooms look like for grown-ups with little manipulatives for the children (Field notes, April, 2014).

In another case, School 3 classroom arrangement was more or less similar with School 1 and the observation guide note states

The school is a one classroom preschool accommodating varying age group children. It was residence of a farmer in that locality rented by the funding organization. The room's floor is covered with mats and children usually learn and do activities sat on the mats. The walls were decorated with different learning aids and children works. Children's names appear across the walls and their works were attached in the folder with specific date of the works to follow up the progress of each child. The classroom was furnished and equipped with books, dramatic play, home living area, art center, sensory manipulatives, blocks, puzzles, Math, language, Science, etc. corners. The preschool is supported by NGOs (international and local) so that it had adequate materials and supplies (Field notes, April, 2014).

The classrooms in the three schools had variations in many ways. The way the rooms are decorated, the materials the classrooms are furnished with, the size of the rooms to accommodate children and materials, and the categorization of the rooms into different corners were different. In fact this has its own implication on children learning and development.

4.3.2. Organization of outdoor services

Arrangement of a balanced and varied outdoor environment, according to Catron and Allen as cited in Jackman (2001) “involves understanding children’s perceptual motor development, incorporating outdoor activities into lesson plans, and regularly altering the outdoor environment to enhance opportunities for skill development (p.53).”

Planning also includes a process for developing curriculum for the outdoors in a way that parallels what teachers do indoors. This is done by putting out new props for the children to discover and respond to, keeping an eye on the evolving play, and planning for emerging developmental interests and skills (Curtis & Carter, 1996).

According to my observation in the three kindergartens, the playground seems more or less similar across all the observed schools. Mary-go-round, slide, seesaw, swing are common to all the schools. In addition to these, School 2 has plastic hoops, horses, and climbers. Differences in the playground equipment were; School 1 has equipment made of iron sheets here is Addis; School 2 has plastic equipment imported from abroad; and School 3 equipment were made of cheap, easy, and locally available materials in the locality (Field notes, April, 2014).

To summarize, the materials and equipment of the preschools in the study schools were somehow similar with the exception of very few equipment. The major difference was on classroom’s organization. Schools that focused on cognitive development of children were using visuals and those that focus on overall development domains focused on manipulatives.

4.4. Parent teacher interaction

School parent relationship is the most important component towards the achievement of shared goals. According to (Bredekamp and Copple as cited in Jackman, 2001), they stressed the importance of this relationship as it should be reciprocal between teachers and families that require mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility and negotiation of conflicts toward achievement of shared goals (p.51). Mainly, it is the teacher's responsibility to create and maintain the lines of communication with parents. Despite, the importance of positive teacher parent relationship to know the child, teach parents on issues of child rearing and nutrition, assisting children, and reduce problems; teachers and principals have complained of parents' responsiveness.

In the one-on-one interview with the kindergarten principals and teachers, Principal 1 and Principal 2 stated "problem of many parents to come to school and discuss with teachers". I posed a question to the teachers "why this is happening?" In the discussion I noticed the mechanisms kindergartens employ to create and keep up the relationship also matters. For example, Teacher 1 says,

I frequently call parents to come to school to discuss about different issues like the food they send, how children are doing in the school, the behavior, the support parents should provide, etc. but very few and limited parents respond to my request. Most of the reasons were "I was busy" and "I never heard" (Field notes, April, 2014).

School 1, uses a monthly parent education program as a system of enhancing the awareness of parents on preschool education. But, if they did not come, it has

established alternative ways, to come on Fridays. However, it seems difficult for two reasons. First, Friday is a weekday in which many parents may not be able to show up due to work related matters. Secondly, the parenting program would be at the expense of the children's time.

On the other hand, in my interview with Teacher 2 (School 2), the parent teacher relationship was explained in different ways from the above.

I used to call parents to discuss issues about children's learning and behavior. But the responses were not encouraging. I now rely more on the communication book except some urgent and important issues such as injuries, absenteeism, exceptional behavior problems and the like. In such cases, I sometimes I write notes to parents and send to the children or call their cell phones (Field notes, April, 2014).

In the document review, I have observed a good system of communication with parents. School 2 uses communication book to maintain parent-teacher interaction on a daily basis. The communication book was prepared by the school in an organized way to put the teacher's daily observations about the child and a space for the parent's feedback. According to the head teacher, "communication books should be written and reviewed every day. If the teacher has no comment, she will sign and send it to parents so that parents see and comment, if any." Every communication is dated and signed by the teacher and the parent. Such a system enabled parents to monitor both children's as well as teacher's performance. Besides, the school conducts parent-teacher conferences on quarterly basis to inform parents on the accomplishments and needs of the

individual child. This mandatory parent-teacher meeting is supported by receiving compiled quarterly performance report of the child to be reviewed and signed by the child's parents or caregivers (Field notes, April, 2014).

To conclude, the interaction between parents of children and teachers of preschools has been found out to be weak and sporadic. The study revealed lack of systematic way of engaging parents as the main reason. Regarding the problem, although teachers condemned parents for their irresponsible behavior to their children learning and development, parents also complain of schools frequent call for silly and unimportant issues without due consideration to parents and caregivers responsibilities.

4.5. Teachers' qualification, experience and role

4.5.1. Teachers' qualification and experience

The Strategic Operational Plan and Guidelines for ECCE clearly puts teachers of kindergarten 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" (2010, p. 56).

Teaching methodology in these schools necessitates child-centered approach with the children actively involved in the learning process.

The study figured out the majority of teachers in the kindergartens were not qualified and experienced to conduct the teaching learning process in the kindergartens. The majority of them had diploma and degree. But it does not mean that they are qualified as long as they have no preschool certificate from a recognized teacher training

institute. Two of the teachers were grade 10 and 12 complete with additional short term trainings.

The findings below were based on the method of document analysis in the three study schools. I had the opportunity to look profiles of the teachers and found out that School 1 had seven teachers (all of them certified and more than three years of experience) teaching 159 students in three sections. The second school, School 2, had 22 teachers (one certificate, 12 diploma, and 9 Degree) teaching 368 children in 11 sections. School 3, had only two teachers (10th and 12th complete with additional trainings) teaching 34 children in one section.

The study identified teachers' qualification, hands-on experience and knowledge and application of child development theories and play-based approaches were minimal. The majority of the preschool teachers had diploma and degree but their knowledge of child development theories and child focused teaching methodologies was limited. This has been proved from the teaching learning processes and children management techniques during classroom observations and outdoor play activities.

4.5.2. Teaching learning process

Teaching methodology in preschools should be "child-centered with the children actively involved in the learning process" (MoE, 2010). The teacher should take different roles in the school in order to achieve the objectives of the school. Among the major roles of the teacher in an early childhood education are facilitation, participate in activities with children, communicator of parents, and encourager of engagement of all

children (p. 56). As a facilitator s/he should be “role model” for children in any of his/her activities with children. The teacher also needs to “engage in activities with children” rather than presenting how something should or must be done. Teacher as “communicator of parents” is the most important role of teachers in order to get the confidence and the support of parents (Miller, 1996, p.70-76).

With regard to methodology, the MOE (2010) clearly put, the program should be child-centered and follow play-based approach (p.25).

The results below were based on classroom observations in the three kindergartens as participant observer.

The classroom was a 4-5 years old children class, consisting of thirty two boys and twenty three girls. The period was large and small muscle development through different indoor play materials. Teacher 1 greeted students and introduced the children the day’s lesson, i.e. “play with materials.”

“Students” said Teacher 1. “Yes Miss” replied the children. Today “We are going to play with puzzles, blocks, and sand. Miss “X” (the assistant teacher) and me will show and give you how to do and what you do. In your group, you will assemble as you saw it before. Everybody will participate and I am moving around to see you.” When she moved around, students were shouting “Mihh! Mihh! Mi!” to receive the puzzles they want. The teacher puts one puzzle on each table and shows them as it was assembled. “Have you seen what it looks like?” “Yes! Yes!” shouted together. Then she disassembled and throws the

pieces on the table. They scrambled. Two of the children in the group could not get anything. They were almost to start to tears. One of the students “Miss...stretching her bare hands” complained. The teacher with soothing voice said, “Do not you want to share them?” two of them dropped three pieces holding the others. The teacher left the group and joined the next group (Field notes, April, 2014).

The teachers were trying to demonstrate how to assemble the puzzles. But the children could not wait the teachers. The students in two of the groups were quarreling. On one table, there was no puzzle and the students were idle looking around their colleagues (Field notes, April, 2014).

In another classroom with preparatory students (kindergarten three), I was observing a Math class.

Teacher 2 greeted the students and called a student, the most active participant yesterday, to help her distribute students’ Math in Amharic exercise books to each group. The topic was “telling the time”. She drew a clock on the black board, pointing at three o’clock. Do you know what this is? Is there anyone who would like to tell me? A Clock! The teacher started explaining. “When the short pointer is at three and the longer one here (at twelve), we call it three o’clock.” The teacher tried to change the hour pointer at different places to show them different hours of the day. Then the students were given classwork in order to practice telling the time. After a while, she ordered to open their exercise books and copy the exercises and try at home. The children started

copying the exercises from the chalkboard. One of the students said, “Miss I finish” and others followed as well. The teacher was encouraged those finished labeling “bravo!”, “ambessa!”, “great!” etc. (Field notes April, 2014).

In another scenario, I was observing a multi-grade classroom, as non-participant observer while children were engaged in outdoor play. The teachers (Teacher 3 and her assistant) told the students to put everything in the room and go outside for play.

Children start running to the playground and round the equipment that they liked to play. Some children follow older children expecting their support. The teachers went with the children and instructed “No pushing! Queue!” The two teachers separated and joined the swing and slide groups, where there were many students. Teacher 3 standing by the swing said to one of the students, who was ready to push, “before you push her, let her properly sit” she warned the girl “come to the middle and hold the rope tightly”. “Okay miss!” replied the girl giggling. The teacher gave a cue to push. The boy started pushing gently and then slightly harder and harder ...until the girl said “stop! stop! ...” the teacher shown the pushing boy to put his legs in a running position at the back and hold the tire (used car tire) gently. Then, the boy replaced her sit (Field notes April, 2014).

Many of the students were having fun with the equipment without guidance from the teachers. As the playground has different play equipment children move from one play equipment to the other. Extending my observation I went to the assistant teacher, who was with the managing the sliding students.

The teacher selected three of the students and took them out to other equipment. The students were four year olds that could not climb up. One student has risen at the top and was ready to slide. The assistant teacher stopped her and instructed to “sit and come down leg first, hands on the side of the sliding bars” before sliding. She was also clearing students from the destination, shouting “leave! leave!” to avoid collision (Field notes April, 2014).

When the girl came for the second round, the teacher shown her to queue at the back and leave the turn to children before her.

The teachers’ roles in playing fields were so vast and multiple in order to assist children develop the proper muscles, manage their emotions, and avoid injuries.

From the classroom and playground observations, I wondered on the methodologies preschool teachers were employing and posed question on the approaches of the kindergartens in realizing the holistic development of the child. The interview responses of the study participants revealed “play-based approach but not child-centered.”

Interviewer: what teaching methodology/ies do you employ to realize holistic development of the child?

Principal 1: play is the major approach in teaching our students. Since every child has its own interest, they are left to choose what they want and whom they would like to play with, particularly during free play. But sometimes we have to give them little choice when we want them to learn some specific skills or knowledge.

To the question above, Principal 2 said, “Although play is basic in our teaching learning methodology, children need to learn specific knowledge, skills and behavior as per our

annual plan of action. Therefore, it will be difficult for us to strictly follow children interests and needs alone.” Teacher 2 in the same school stressed, “I have specific tasks for each day and for each subject. I cannot let children wonder without plan. So, I have to fulfill my responsibilities using play as a major tool for my teaching. But the choice of lessons is my responsibility” (Field notes, April, 2014).

4.6. Assessment of children

Preschools always assess children performance in order to check whether the intended program achieves its goal or not. This is usually done in a number of ways. Among these are observations and portfolios.

Assessment is the process of observing, recording, and otherwise documenting work that children do and how they do it, as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect the child (NAEYC & NAECS\SDE in Miller 1996, p.421). Preschool education is a system comprising complex processes that determine the future of the child. So, proper assessment of the child is mandatory to achieve the intended objective of the program. In order to understand the processes of assessment in kindergartens, I posed questions to preschool teachers “how they assess kindergarten children?”

Assessment of children in School 1 was based on observation. According to Teacher 1, assessment is an integral part of the curriculum to all teachers and I usually do this through “observing children inside and outside the classroom setting and record performances and behaviors regularly on a performance sheet.” She added that “the classroom observation includes how each child is

accomplishing the tasks s/he is doing. I will record what I observed on the individual performance sheet developed by the school and put in his/her personal profile regularly depending on the observable behavior he/she is exhibiting” (Field notes April, 2014).

Similarly, Teacher 2 also used more or less the same procedure as above. In addition to the above,

I use periodic tests to assess the performance of children in the preschool. Unlike the daily classwork’s and homework’s, quarterly tests are provided and the cumulative feedback is shared to parents. Parents will receive a report card that shows the overall performance of the child that should be seen, reviewed, signed and returned to the school for documentation. The four quarter performances will add up the overall performance of the child over the year. Among the most important observable behaviors of our students, the most prominent ones are selected and communicated to parents through the daily communication books. Parents see, comment, and sign before they send it back to school (Field notes, April, 2014).

During my observation in School 2, I have noticed a list of children’s names in different categories. Some of the lists were “Active participants from KG 1”, “The cleanest students from KG 2”, “the best hand writers in KG 3”, etc. To my question, “What does these mean?” the teacher said, “we assess and encourage our students by displaying their names per category to reward positive behaviors and skills and demotivate undesirable behaviors by denying children from ‘movie room’, sitting ‘disturbing

children' on a "red chair" (the most disturbing child will sit on a red chair), sending to nursery classes (Field notes, April, 2014).

The views of Teacher 3 during the interview session was captured as,

I use observation as a major tool to assess my students but specifically I employ portfolio technique. Every child has a profile in a form of pocket posted on the walls. His/her best works will be collected and put inside the pocket in a way that can be observed by others. I also record the same in his/her personal profile. The works are dated so that the progress of the child can easily be traced over the academic year (Field notes, April, 2014).

The assessment processes in the study schools were different depending on the knowledge and experience of teachers and the purpose of the assessment. The major techniques to assess children performance were observation and tests (during classroom sessions). As a method of recording the performance results, portfolios, assessment forms and report cards were used.

Finally, performance assessment of children in preschools was concentrated on specific developmental domains of the child and was used for 'promotion' purposes. In doing this teachers were using observations, portfolios, and tests. The performance assessment rates were made visible to all children so as to encourage good performances and positive behaviors and discourage undesirable behaviors.

4.7. Commitment on preschool education

Awareness on the importance of early childhood education is so vast that scholars have said and written volumes of books and conducted a number of studies. However, the

deep-rooted cultural influence towards child rearing and education on the one hand and inability of this age group to claim its right, particularly in developing countries like Ethiopia, has made the preschool practice very weak. Studies revealed awareness on the importance of early childhood education and the practices vary across individuals, institutions or organizations, and countries.

The challenges identified from the study participants were: “low level of parental involvement” in the teaching learning and development of children, “low commitment of the government” to promote preschool education, problem of many private investors involved in the sector failure to “follow preschool standards.”

The opinions of the study participants during the interview with the three school principals were stated as below.

Interviewer: what challenges have you ever faced in discharging you role?

Principal 1 said “low level of parental involvement and extreme poverty” as a major challenge.

The school caters for pro poor children who have no parent (both or one of them), or children with parents who are very poor. Many of the parents do not care about the importance of positive and close relationship with the school/teacher to support their children. They think of the school as a safe place to leave their kids to earn their daily bread rather than considering the school as an important learning and development center for their children. Children usually come to school hungry. Some parents even send children without lunch packs, thinking the school might feed them, or lack of choice. Teachers of the

school contribute money every month to buy bread for needy children. Besides, some better off individuals provide food for the children (at the time of the interview, I have witnessed about a basket of bread from one generous individual) (Field notes, April, 2014).

For the same question above, Principal 2, said,

The major challenge is the relationship with parents. Our work demands day-to-day interaction with parents. But, many parents are not willing to come and discuss about their children, even some parents are reluctant to follow up and provide timely feedback about their children progress. Besides, when we give feedback about the child, some parents will not accept positively. They do not think the feedback is genuine (Field notes, April, 2014).

The challenge for School 3 seems similar with respect to parental awareness. In addition to that, the school classroom had quality problem to conduct the teaching learning process. According to the views of Principal 3 during the interview,

The school we are using was a residence so it lacks the qualities and comfort a typical school should possess (lighting, ventilation, child friendliness). Besides, the place is a rural area in which many of the parents are poor and have low awareness towards preschool education. Absence of formal education in the surrounding forced us to receive over aged children (6+) that compelled multi-level teaching methodology (Field notes, April, 2014).

The other challenge observed in the study schools was “commitment of the government to promote preschool education” This issue has been seen from budget and resource allocations, manpower assignment, and provision of technical support.

The interview response by a school principal (Principal 1) in explaining the government commitment to promote preschool education stressed,

The school has no budget at all. We are totally dependent up on the generosity and willingness of the primary school. Even the stationery support is coming from the primary school. To overcome the problem, the school approached different donor organizations. Although the support is intermittent, few NGOs shown us their support. For example, Amanuel Development Association has provided us material support like mattresses, bed sheets, children’s books, and learning materials (mainly puzzles, blocks). We have also got on-the-job training at the beginning of the academic year from JICA volunteers in collaboration with Plan International (Field notes, April, 2014).

Extending the conversation, the principal said, the government was not proactive in allocating resources for preschools. ,

Before we transferred to this building, the preschool has been functioning in an old and uncomfortable classroom (showing an old, nearly falling, house made of eucalyptus and plastered with mud) accommodating not more than thirty children. This building (a new one story building) was intended for other purposes. When I asked the building for the preschool, people (the responsible government officials at the time) were laugh at me (implied), saying

it is intended for office or “O” class. However, with the relentless effort of the committee (parents and teachers), we are able to get the building. When we receive the building, it was not ready for teaching learning (the rooms were not cleaned and not painted). The school teachers and parents took the responsibility, have it painted and prepared it for teaching learning (Field notes, April, 2014).

In another scenario, the sub city preschool education expert addressed the government commitment from different perspective. The government pays “substandard salary” to preschool professionals and gives little emphasis to “assign adequate manpower” to the sector. Her opinion from the interview was captured as

Preschool experts in Addis Ababa are paid lower than their counterparts in other areas of expertise. For example, while experts of primary, secondary, or adult education are paid at Professional Science (PS) - 5 and above, the preschool expert is paid at PS – 3. Besides, in the current academic year, there are 111 preschools in the Sub City. All these preschools are expected to be supported by one preschool expert (Field notes, April, 2014).

This implies poor follow up and technical support from the Sub City Education Office.

The last but not least challenge identified by the study participants was the “failure to follow preschool standards”

The Sub City Education Office Preschool Expert stressed problem of private kindergartens failure to follow standards set for preschools as, “many of the private kindergartens are not willing to follow the preschool curriculum and guides designed by

the government. Besides, they used textbooks prepared by the school teachers mainly copied from abroad” (Field notes, April, 2014).

This issue has been confirmed from the school principal interview session above (see details on curriculum usage).

To conclude, low awareness of parents towards preschool education, poverty, and lack of commitment from the government were the major challenges in promoting preschool education in the sub city. The lacks of commitments from the government side were also seen from addressing the manpower need of the sector and lack of collaborative work with other bureaus. There is only one preschool teacher training institute (only Kotebe is supplying the manpower need of the sector in the country) and lack of collaboration among education, health, and women and children affairs bureau were additional attributes for the low level of government commitment in promoting preschool education.

4.8. Summary of the findings

The aim of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of the pre-primary education program in Akaki Kaliti Sub City of Addis Ababa. The study employed qualitative research approach to examine the basic processes of kindergartens in Akaki Kaliti Sub City in order to find out best practices and challenges of the kindergartens, propose solutions, and advance knowledge on the sector. In this respect, the objective of the study was guided by the following basic research questions:

1. How do teachers in preschools/kindergartens implement the curriculum to realize holistic development of the child?

- i. Is the learning environment (indoor and outdoor facilities) appropriate and adequate enough to pursue kindergarten education?
 - ii. How effectively do parents and preschool teachers interact to advance children's learning and development?
 - iii. Do kindergarten teachers have the competence and adequacy to implement the curriculum?
2. Do kindergarten teachers employ teaching methodologies appropriate to children age, developmental level and local context?
3. How do kindergartens evaluate and assess children progress?

The study involved interviews with ten participants in three kindergartens. The findings are the results of interviews, observations and document analysis of the study. Although the results represent the practices of the three kindergartens participated in the study, the results and conclusions drawn from the themes that emerged from the data collection instruments were consistent with other studies.

Findings

General:

The study revealed that the settings of the three kindergartens were quite different in terms of the localities where the schools are in, the socioeconomic background of parents, the ownership of the kindergartens, and qualification and experiences of the teachers. These differences had influence on the practices of the

kindergartens. The impact has been seen on the use of the curriculum, parent teacher interaction, and teaching methodologies of teachers.

In the section below, summary of the major findings are presented. These are:

1. Implementation of the preschool curriculum was done in different ways. Thematic approach of the government curriculum and curriculum guides were used in the two schools (School 1 and School 3) while independent annual plan of action and textbooks was used by the other school (School 2).
2. The materials and equipment of the preschools in the study schools were somehow similar with the exception of quality and type of some outdoor equipment.
3. Classroom organization of preschool was different. Schools that focused on cognitive development of children were organizing their classrooms with visuals while those focuses on overall development domains organize classrooms with manipulative.
4. The interaction between parents of children and teachers of preschools has been found out to be weak and sporadic. The study revealed lack of systematic way of engaging parents as the main reason.
5. Teachers' qualification, hands-on experience and knowledge and application of child development theories and play-based approaches were found out minimal.

6. Preschool teachers who had diploma and degree were using lectures and drills for preschool children. These teachers were also giving low emphasis in guiding children during outdoor plays. The assistant teachers were responsible for the management of outdoor plays.
7. Performance assessment of children in preschools was mainly concentrating on specific developmental domains of the child and was used for 'promotion' purposes. In doing this, teachers were using observations, portfolios, and tests.
8. The government commitment to promote preschool education was found low.
 - a. There was no budget allocated for preschools.
 - b. Technical support to kindergartens was intermittent and minimal.
 - c. There is lack of adequate supply of preschool teachers. One institution (Kotebe Preschool Teacher Training Institute is responsible to produce preschool teachers to the country).
 - d. The Sub City Education Office preschool section was managed by single expert, i.e. one person was responsible to monitor and provide technical support to 111 preschools in the Sub City.
 - e. The salary of preschool experts in Akaki Kality Sub City was much lower than their equivalent counterparts in other sections.

- f. There was lack of collaborative work among education, health, and women and children affairs bureaus that had an impact on the education and development of children.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of the pre-primary education program in Akaki Kality Sub City of Addis Ababa. The study employed qualitative research approach to examine the basic processes of kindergartens in Akaki Kality Sub City in order to find out best practices and challenges of the kindergartens, propose solutions, and advance knowledge on the sector.

In this chapter, discussion of the major findings will precede and conclusions and recommendations of the study will be made.

5.1. Discussion

In the discussion section, major themes of the study will be discussed in relation to literature and other studies vis-à-vis answering the basic questions of the research.

Research question #1: How do teachers in preschools/kindergartens implement the curriculum to realize holistic development of the child?

5.1.1. Implementation of the preschool curriculum

The study that focused on the practices of preschools in Akaki Kality revealed diversified curriculum implementation practices among different actors/institutions. Thematic approach of the government curriculum and curriculum guides were used in the two schools (School 1 and School 3) while independent annual plan of action and textbooks was used by the other school (School 2). Addis Ababa City Government Bureau (AACG),

2011; Adane, (2008) affirmed implementation of curriculum was different among all providers of the pre-school programs. That is, almost all of the private....pre-schools were providing subject based teaching programs,...while government pre-schools were providing programs that are designed by the government to cultivate children's mental, physical, emotional and social developments of the children vis-à-vis the standard period distributions per week (AACG, 2011, p.48-49).

The practices were highly dependent on different factors that were not easily visible. The experience had influenced the preschool teacher trapped among different actors involved in the sector: children; who are direct beneficiaries of the program; the government that set the standards to abide by; private investors, who have profit orientation; and parents, who wanted to see concrete results and observable positive behaviors on their children. These diversified pulling and pushing factors coupled with lack of resources, technical support, and parents' socio economic and cultural backgrounds put the teachers under lots of stresses that may hamper from realizing the intended objectives.

In addition to these, absence of concrete knowledge and best practices on preschool education was forcing the sector to move haphazardly. The way private schools implement the program was different in many ways from their government and missionary counterparts. This is proved from the practitioners' view that no teacher/principal and the preschool expert were sure of the philosophy and curriculum model/s in which preschools of the sub city or the country were following.

5.1.1.1. Adequacy and appropriateness of preschool materials and equipment

Preschools materials and equipment were adequate in the study schools but the materials and equipment were made available simply to fulfill the requirements of the preschool rather than appropriateness of the materials and equipment to children age, interests, developmental level, and cultural contexts. No preschool was planning to make available the materials and equipment considering each individual child's interest, prior experience and development levels taking into account. Jackman (2001) emphasizes careful "planning for each individual child and group of children, understanding the prior experiences, and development of the children" (p.53) when planning for material and equipment selection in preprimary schools.

Since the materials and equipment in the study schools were somehow similar that children could not use in different ways, they might probably contribute little for new skill, problem solving and creativity of children. Jackman (2001) emphasized selection of open-ended materials to preschool centers in order to encourage children to freely explore, experiment, and create (p.53).

5.1.1.2. Parent-teacher interaction

Parents are the child's first and most important teachers. When the child joins school, the responsibility will be shared between the parent and the teacher. Hence, maintaining strong partnership between early childhood practitioners and parents is vital for the greater benefits of the child (Davis, 2008, p.6). However, the findings of the

study revealed weak and sporadic interaction between parents of children and teachers of preschools. The main reason for this was lack of systematic way of engaging parents.

According to (Bredekamp and Copple as cited in Jackman, 2001), they emphasized on the importance of two way relationship between teachers and families focusing on mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility towards the achievement of common goals (p.51). They further laid the responsibility to teachers in order to keep the lines of communication open to families (p.51). From the study, private schools have exhibited better and coordinated system of communication that can be taken as a lesson (see details on p.52-54).

Parent-teacher relationship is important not only to follow up performance of children but also in other development areas like health and nutrition issues. Teachers reported observation of non-nutritious foods (School 2) and sending children without lunch packs (School 1). All these problems could be solved if and only if positive and mutual relationship between schools and families persists.

5.1.1.3. Adequacy of teachers

The study identified the number of preschool teachers to children was adequate in all the study schools as per the standards set in the Strategic Guideline of the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2010, p.45). The study findings revealed teacher child ratios as 1:17 (in School 2 and 3) and 1:27 in School 1 (see table 2). Although the ratios were within the standards, classroom observations in School 1 revealed inability of the teachers to properly manage the children. Particularly, where there were shortage of materials and

activities that require demonstration and guidance, more than twenty children in a classroom might be difficult to care and handle.

Research question #2: Do kindergarten teachers employ teaching methodologies appropriate to children age, developmental level and local context?

5.1.2. Preschool teachers' qualification and hands-on experience

Teachers' qualification, hands-on experience and knowledge and application of child development theories and play-based approaches were found to be limited. The study identified preschool teacher who have over qualified (diploma and degree holders) from the minimum requirement, however, the field of study and knowledge and skills of the teacher in child teaching methodologies were limited. In an interview with Principal 2, she mentioned problem of the diploma and degree holders to prepare lessons appropriate to children age and developmental level, prepare child friendly teaching media and handling children. Teachers of these qualifications (diploma and degree) provide more emphasis to classroom teaching than outdoor play. As in School 2, outdoor play was left to the assistant teachers. Nevertheless, scholars stressed "Outdoor time requires adults who are playful, have sharp senses and quick reactions, and who will closely observe children." He further advised preschool teachers to "save reading, resting, parent conferences, team meetings, and even casual conversations with other adults for more appropriate occasions. Your attentive eyes can prevent an injury (p.36-38)."

Generally, the preschool teachers in the observed schools needed additional child development and child focused teaching methodologies to properly care and teach children.

Research question #3: How do kindergartens evaluate and assess children progress?

5.1.3. Assessment of preschool children

The findings of the study revealed preschool teachers' assessments were concentrated on specific developmental domains of the child and used mainly for 'promotion' purposes. Scholars on the field/sector argued that assessment of children performance should not only focus on the outcomes but also on the processes (Jackman, 2001, p.77-78). They further argue that the main purposes of assessments should be in "identifying children's interactions with the environment and their emerging capabilities". Assessments should also capitalize on the strengths of the learners rather than identifying weaknesses (p.78). Likewise, the teachers in School 2 and 3 were focusing on strengths of the learners by displaying encouraging performances of children to other learners and documenting the same. Whereas, School 1 experience was documenting the child's shortcomings in order to curb his/her problems.

The processes of the assessment in these schools were found out to be observations (all schools), portfolios (all schools), and tests (School 2). A study conducted by (AACG, 2011), confirmed consistent use of tests by private schools to assess performance of children (p.61). According to Miller (1996) assessment can be done through different

processes like “observations, interviews, portfolios, checklists, rating scales, evaluation, or finished products.”

Assessments in the study schools were mainly done at classrooms in which the teacher and children have face-to-face contacts. Teachers had little concern outside the classroom especially during large motor development activities. As it has been explained earlier, the outdoor plays were left to assistant teachers without due consideration to physical and emotional development of children.

Research question #4: What are the major challenges that hinder preschools in Akaki Kality from achieving their purposes?

5.1.4. Challenges of preschool education

The major challenges identified in the study were low awareness of parents towards preschool education, poverty, low commitment of the government to promote kindergarten education, and unwillingness of the private sector to follow preschool standards.

Low level of engagement of parents with schools is mainly a problem of teachers. As Jackman (2001) emphasized, creating and maintaining the lines of communication between schools and families is the responsibility of the teacher. In doing this teachers should be sensitive, understanding, and creative to scan their environment, particularly the lives of parents. Simply putting rules may not help achieve objectives of the schools unless mutual understanding and cooperation prevails between the two.

To exemplify the problem, there is no allocated budget for preschools, at sub city level the sector is run by one expert, the salary of preschool experts is much lower than their equivalent counterparts in other sections, absence of teacher training institutes (only Kotebe is supplying the manpower need of the sector in the country), and though the policy framework emphasizes to run the sector in collaboration with health and women and children affairs bureau, there is no sign of this unity.

Low level of the government commitment has been exemplified in many ways in the study. Absence of allocated budget for preschools, assignment of manpower at sub city level, provision of competitive salary to professionals, supply of qualified and experienced teachers and principals, and creating harmony and collaboration among responsible bureaus for the care and education of children.

Although government kindergartens are tuition free and cater for the pro poor section of the community, the schools lack budget to properly run the centers. The response of Principal 1 was “we have no budget ... even supply of stationery is under the mercy of the primary school”. This same school was new with “vacant rooms” but due to lack of budget to hire additional preschool teachers the resources were underutilized and many children were denied of the opportunity to attend school.

Assignment of preschool professionals is the responsibility of the government. Akaki Kaliti Sub city Education Office has only one preschool education expert (Field note, April, 2014). However, there were 111 pre-primary schools in the 2006 E.C academic year (Document review note, February, 2014). From this figure, one can understand the

problem in terms of follow up and technical support. Besides, the professional was the least paid staff from her equivalent counterparts (the preschool expert is paid at professional science III level while other professionals with equivalent qualification and experience paid at professional science V level).

In Addis Ababa alone, there were more than one thousand preschools in 2005 E.C. (MoE, 2013). However, the sole provider of qualified preschool teachers is Kotebe Teacher's Training Institute. This institute cannot even satisfy the demand of Addis Ababa let alone the country. To my surprise, I could not find a single Kotebe certified teacher in the three study schools. This shows the critical shortage of qualified teachers in the preschools and the associated problem of substandard output in the sector.

In the case of working collaboratively with responsible bureaus, the policy framework of the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2010) says, "management of ECCE services and programs through various sector ministries and organizations should be streamlined and approached in an integrated way" (p.29). The major responsible ministries were education, health and women affairs and youth bureaus. But there is no sign of this collaboration and integrated work.

Therefore, it is possible to say that early childhood education is the least priority among the education provisions for the government.

5.2. Limitations of the study

The study relied exclusively on qualitative data-gathering techniques, the primary research instrument being an author-constructed, one-on-one interview schedule and

observation guides. I realized that qualitative research, particularly observation requires more time to acquire reliable and rich data; however, the limited time I had, two weeks, to observe and capture relevant data in the three kindergartens might not enable me to get in depth understanding of the context in the schools.

Moreover, the study used very small participant sample in which ten individual participants were recruited through purposive sampling. That being so, it might be difficult to generalize the findings of the study, though generalizability was not the purpose of the study.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested for effective preschool education practices:

- It is recommended that preschool should follow unified curriculum that can enhance the holistic development of the child. Implementation of the preschool curriculum should be strictly monitored and technically supported by the government. Provision of the curriculum and teacher's guides should be available to all (government, private, community, etc. preschools) without preconditions.
- Preschool classroom should be organized in a manner that can promote development of the whole child. Particularly, different corner in the classroom should be based on interests of children and life skill requirements of the world of life.

- Parents should be made aware that their services are very important in the education of their children. In this regard, preschools should understand their environments and design appropriate ways of engaging parents. Some working practices include; introducing communication books, using letters, organizing parent conferences, inviting parents to schools to share their cultures and experiences.
- There should be regular and continuous professional development practice to preschool teachers particularly on child teaching methodologies, preparation of child friendly teaching media, and child development techniques and practices.
- The government should encourage private investors to participate in the training of preschool teachers. Addressing the preschool teacher's demand of the country by a single government institution is completely impossible.
- The findings of the study shows preschools performance assessment concentrated mainly on conceptual development domains of the child and were used for 'promotion' purposes. Hence, practitioners should be aware of the techniques to assess holistic development of the child. It should also be made clear that assessment of children should focus on the strengths and emerging capabilities of the child rather than the weaknesses and deficiencies of the child.
- The government commitment should focus on the early years of the child in order to share the future hopes of this country. In this regard, budget should be allocated to the sector, the manpower needs of Sub City Education Offices

should be revisited, and salary and benefit packages of preschool experts should be commensurate with the workload and other equivalent professionals.

- The envisaged collaboration and integrated design of the ECCE policy framework should be practical.

5.4. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of the pre-primary education program in Akaki Kaliti Sub City of Addis Ababa. This chapter has therefore brought the research to its conclusion, in which the questions formulated in Chapter One have been investigated and the aims met.

By summarizing the main findings and the data collected, the researcher was in a position to say the practices of preschool education in Akaki Kaliti Sub City was different due to differences in the knowledge and skills of the teachers, ownership of the kindergartens, and the localities of the preschools.

The early childhood period was so complex that involved the collaborative effort of parents, schools, governments, and other supporters in realizing the holistic development of the child. The data analysis indicated that teachers' qualifications and teaching methods; the classroom environment and its organization; playgrounds and play equipment; parent teacher interactions; and assessment practices were the basic processes that determine the practices of kindergartens in the Sub City.

Finally, low level of the government commitment was the major challenge to differences in practices of preschool education in the country, particularly Akaki Kality Sub City.

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APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Early childhood practices and challenges: The case of Akaki Kality

Data collector: Girma Sileshi students of AAU

The purpose of this study is to understand the practices and challenges of early childhood education in Akaki Kality sub city of Addis Ababa and communicate to the reader.

INFORMATION

Procedures that will be employed in the study include:

1. Participant will choose a convenient place for the interview.
2. A participant and the researcher will sit around a table on which the researcher interview and tape record the views.
3. The interview will be guided with open-ended questions.
4. The researcher will probe and make notes during the interviews.
5. Each interview session will take 30 to 90 minutes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, through phone Girma Sileshi at +251-911-.....

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate anytime.

CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature Date _____

Researcher's signature Date _____

**Appendix B: Interview guide for preschool teachers and principals
Addis Ababa University**

Institute of Educational Research

Interview guide to preschool principals and teachers

General direction: this interview is designed to study the practices and challenges of preschool centers in Akaki Kality Sub City of Addis Ababa. The questions below call for your knowledge and experience in the field of kindergarten education. The information will be used only for academic purposes. In turn, I want to assure you are anonymous, keep your ideas confidential, and use pseudonyms across my research report.

Thank you in advance!

Background Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your highest qualification?
4. How long have you been in your position?
5. Do you have kindergarten training? Where? For how long?
6. Have you got on-the-job training? If yes? Who provided the training? For how long? On what topics? Was it helpful?

Interview guide for principals and teachers

1. Do you have curriculum? Who prepared it?
2. How do you use the curriculum in relation to children age, development level, and cultural background?

3. What contents do you use for kindergarten children? What is the basis for these?
4. What is the language of instruction? Why you choose that?
5. Do you have textbooks? If yes? Who developed? How they are developed?
6. How is your classrooms organized?
7. How do you assess the preschool teachers in terms of qualifications and experience?
8. Do you have adequate and appropriate indoor and outdoor facilities to promote child learning and development? If yes? How do you use them?
9. How do you interact with parents? Do they have any role in the kindergarten?
10. How do you assess children performance in the school? Why?
11. What type of methodologies do kindergartens teachers employ?
12. What is the role of the sub city education department in promoting early childhood education?
13. What challenges do you face and how you overcome these challenges?
14. Any other issue you want to tell me?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix C: Observation guide

Indoor and outdoor

1. Are the learning centers well defined?
2. Is there enough space for the activity to take place, but not too much open space to encourage running?
3. Are noisy and quiet centers separated?
4. Can both children and teacher move about freely?
5. Is the room uncluttered but still warm and inviting?
6. Is there clear visibility so the teacher can see all the children?
7. Are equipment and furniture movable and is the arrangement flexible according to changing needs? When you convert your room for lunch or nap, do you do it the same way every day to encourage your children to feel comfortable and secure?
8. Is the furniture appropriate for the physical size of the children?
9. Is the environment flexible to accommodate children with special needs?
10. Are bathroom facilities convenient?
11. Are there playground equipment? If yes? Are they to the developmentally appropriate to children age and culture?
12. Are there sleeping rooms for little children?
13. Are there dining rooms?
14. Do children have access to materials, books, etc that are appropriate to them?
15. Do teachers treat children appropriately?

16. Are the classrooms arranged in different ways/corners that can promote development of the 'whole child'?
17. Are the rooms supplied with TV, computers, video, etc?
18. Do teachers use real objects and locally made teaching media during the teaching learning process?
19. Do kindergartens have clear schedule?
20. Are electrical outlets available in the right place? Are they covered when not in use?
21. Is lighting adequate?
22. Are the materials and supplies for each center visible to and available for use by the children? Are directions clear and age appropriate?
23. Is the number of children per center controlled?
24. Are materials limited in each center to offer choices that are not overwhelming but still offer enough materials for all?
25. Does each center offer visual clues for placement of materials and equipment while encouraging cleanup?
26. Are storage containers labeled with objects, pictures, photographs, or outlines of the contents?
27. Are the learning centers organized and attractive and appropriate for young children? Do they reflect cultural diversity free of stereotyping?
28. Does the arrangement within the learning center promote social skills while encouraging cooperative group learning or individual learning?

29. Is there a space for a child to have some alone time?
30. Are pictures and bulletin boards placed at the eye level of children?
31. Does each child have individual space for storage (cubbie)?
32. Is the environment welcoming to parents as they enter the classroom?

Adapted from Jackman (2001, p.66)

Appendix D: Permission to do research

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Date: 07/05/2013

Ref.#: IER/ 344 /2004

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Mr./Mrs. Girma Sileshi Aragaw ID. No. GSE0020111

is a postgraduate student at the Institute of Educational Research. He/She is writing a thesis paper for a course entitled Early childhood education implementation and challenges: the case of Ataki Kaliti Sub City and wants to make use of your organization as a resource of information.

This is, therefore, to kindly request your office to give for the student the necessary support

Thank you.



Derebssa Dufera (Professor)
Director, Institute of Educational Research