



Addis Ababa University
College of Education & Behavioral Studies
Department of Educational Planning & Management

**PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES OF “O-CLASS” PROGRAM IN PUBLIC
PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF EAST SHOA ZONE**

By Mengistu Leta Demissie

**A Thesis is Submitted to the Department of Educational Planning &
Management of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for MA Degree in School Leadership**

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LETTER OF APPROVAL

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LARATION

I, the under signed, declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a second degree in any other University, and that all sources of materials used for the thesis have been properly acknowledged.

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This Thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as University advisor.

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ACRONYMS

CC: Child-to-Child

ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education

ECD: Early Childhood Development

ECE: Early Childhood Education

EMIS: Education Management Information System

ESDP: Education Sector Development Program

MoE: Ministry of Education

NGOs: None Governmental Organizations

NAEYC: National Association of Education of Young Children

OEB: Oromia Education Bureau

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

SRC : School Readiness Class

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UN: United Nations

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of “O class” program in public primary schools in East Shoa Zone in terms of curriculum, qualification and training of teachers, favorable learning environment and fulfillment of necessary learning aids. To address this purpose, data were collected from 3 Woredas selected through cluster sampling method. Out of 164 government primary schools in rural areas of these three selected Woredas 33 schools were selected using simple random sampling. By using availability sampling method, 33 “O-class” teachers, 33 school principals and 5 education experts; totally 71 participants have participated in the study. Descriptive data analysis method has been used to analyze data gathered through questionnaires, interviews, document analysis and observations. Unavailability of curriculum and guideline, lack of professionally qualified and trained teachers, unfavorable learning environment and lack of necessary learning aids were found among the challenges encountering the effective implementation of the program. It was due to less attention and emphasis given for the education of the level that plays an important role in the formation of children’s identity and to prepare them for future stages of their education and development. In order to benefit the children of the level and education system at large, Early Childhood Care and Education in general and “O-class” program in particular is the scientific, economic and right thing to do.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Back ground of the study

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. It can be takes place in formal or informal settings and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. Education is commonly divided formally into such stages as pre-school or kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, college, and university.

Education which is given to three to six years old children before they enter formal schools is called pre-school education. Pre-school education is very important for the development of young children before they enter formal school which helps them in cognitive development of children at the early grades of primary education and it has strong bearing on attendance and participation of children, once they enter primary school. The lack in school readiness makes it difficult for children to adapt themselves to school and show a tendency to drop out.

International organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO are stressing the importance of providing quality early childhood education and care to children, not only for those from less-advantaged backgrounds but for all children. Their arguments are based on the increasing research evidence that has shown long-term benefits of offering young children quality care and education in the early years (Curtis & Maureen O'Hagan, 2003, as cited in Gebre Egziabher, 2014).

The main purpose of pre-school education therefore is to make situations read for formal schools which can be termed as school readiness. School readiness is defined by two characteristic features on three dimensions. The characteristic features are 'transition' and 'gaining competencies', and the

dimensions are children's readiness for school, schools' readiness for children, and families' and communities' readiness for school. Transition is children moving into and adjusting to new learning environments, families learning to work with a socio-cultural system (i.e. education), and schools making provisions for admitting new children into the system, representing individual and societal diversity. (Pia Rebello Britto, 2012)

In Ethiopia the early childhood education was introduced 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. The first modern pre-primary 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. (Demeke, 2007, as cited in Gebre Egziabher 2014).

Nowadays, pre-primary education in Ethiopia includes kindergartens, "O-class" and child to child programs. This level normally involves children of ages 4 to 6 enrolled in the pre-primary education. Kindergartens are predominantly operated by communities and non-governmental organizations such as faith-based institutions mostly in urban area. Government has been involving in pre-primary attached to primary schools ("O-class") and child to child programs to address vulnerable and disadvantaged rural children of the level. The government of Ethiopia introduced "O class" and child to child programs in the primary education system in the past few years. As a result, pre-primary enrolment has increased dramatically starting from the year 2011 and this is because "O class" and child to child enrolments have been counted as part of pre-primary. (MoE, 2013)

"O-Class" is a one-year pre-primary education program, delivered by primary schools, organized for children before they enter grade one. It is designed to

benefit vulnerable and disadvantaged children of age 6, who do not have access to kindergarten, mostly in rural government primary schools.

Although pre-primary education in general and “O-class” program in particular is an important area in the formation of children’s identity and to prepare them for future stages of their development, the Government of Ethiopia has lately started giving attention to this subsector and incorporated it in the latest two Education Sector Development Plans (ESDP IV and ESDP V). There is strong ownership of the National Policy for ECD, which was developed through a participatory and multi-sectoral process spearheaded by the Minister of Education, in coordination with the Ministers of Health and Women’s Affairs.

To support the National Policy Framework, the Government of Ethiopia has formulated a Strategic Operational Plan with four main pillars: (1) parental education, (2) healthy and early child stimulation from pre-natal to 3 years, (3) preschools and kindergartens for 4-6 years and (4) non-formal school readiness such as child-to-child programs. Thus this policy framework made the pre-primary education to include kindergartens, “O-class” and child to child programs. (MoE, 2010).

In the case of Oromia National Region State, the National Policy for ECD has been put in to practice and the program has been implemented since 2002 to benefit vulnerable and disadvantaged children of age 6 who do not have access to kindergarten by annexing it to public primary schools in rural areas for one year. All government primary schools of the region those located in rural areas are expected to open “O-class” so as to teach/ take care of all children of age 6 of the surround villages. It is to prepare the children physically, emotionally, socially and mentally for formal schooling and to prevent poor performances and early dropouts.

It is undeniable that pre-primary education in general and “O-class” program in particular makes up an important environment where children’s future identity develops. This can be meaningful if the concerned bodies, especially the government, give due emphasis and strive for the implementation of programs like “O-class” that can bring remarkable change in the areas of pre-primary education and the education system as a whole.

In Oromia National Regional state remarkable improvements have been registered in the areas of the two education performance indicators namely access and equity. The improvement of the other two indicators, quality and internal efficiency, have not been showing significant change. Hence giving due attention and emphases for the effective implementation of programs like “O-class” is important for their undeniable contribution for the education system as a whole.

Hallinger, (1992) asserts that one way to create education change is to improve pre-primary education which is the base and the most prominent aspect to be considered for the excellence achievement of students when entering to other levels of education. Therefore, pre-primary education has to be well supported by the government and stakeholders for the realization of quality education.

However, the Regional Education Bureau and respective Zonal and Woreda Education Offices including East Shoa Zone have not been in a position to implement “O-class” program as pre-primary education effectively to meet its purpose. Hence this study is indented to investigate the overall practical status and challenges encountered while implementing the program in the locality.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The main purpose of pre-primary education in general and “O-class” program in particular is to prepare children for formal schooling and to prevent poor

performances and early dropouts. Furthermore, pre-schooling programs are designed for the acquisition of basic skills like pre-reading, pre-writing, pre-counting and pre-arithmetic are among others in preparation of children for formal schooling. Accordingly, all activities designed for the children at this stage must incorporate an integrated and flexible educational system that fits the capabilities and potentialities of children and meets their needs and characteristics.

In this regard there is a strong rural-urban division in ECCE provision. In urban areas, there is a diversity of non-governmental providers. Wealthier parents tend to use private preschools, while many poorer parents use faith-based facilities. In rural areas, the private and non-governmental sectors provide very few pre-schools. The coverage and quality of rural ECCE provision is low because government primary school systems are still being consolidated and lack the resources to offer pre-schooling.

A case study conducted on the opportunities and challenges in developing early care and education (ECCE) services in low-resource settings in Ethiopia revealed that the country has been viewed as a success story of Education for All, with the number of children out of school reduced from nearly four in five in 1992 to one in five in 2009. But there are significant challenges in improving the quality of education provision, and an intense focus on primary education has resulted in relatively little attention to ECCE (Young Lives in Ethiopia, 2012). This implies that the subsector has not been given due attention in rural areas and needs to narrow the gap between urban and rural ECCE delivery.

Children who joined pre-primary education including “O-class” program have to learn through an organized curriculum, by qualified teachers, in favorable learning environment fulfilled with necessary learning aids. A curriculum that provides specific guidance and gives clear direction to the practitioners and teachers is needed to benefit these children. The program must be

administered by academically and professionally qualified teachers so as to make children to acquire the basic skills. Learning environment which is conducive to support the children's growth and development, as well as that supports their future learning should be available. Furthermore, the learning environment has to be equipped with learning materials those help children to develop their self-expressive and manipulative skill as well as concept and motor development.

This program has been designed to benefit urban children of age 6 in primary schools that has been implementing in government primary schools. But in practice despite the fact that the National Policy Framework for ECCE exists at national and regional level, it has not been adapted for "O-class" program and even curriculum is not available at regional level. In addition to this there is no clear guideline for effective implementation of the program available in schools. Almost all teachers assigned to teach the children of the level are not professionally qualified and well trained to teach children. So that teachers assigned to teach the level are forced to deliver education for children by their own effort and their own way that differs from school to school. The environmental conditions; site, building, classrooms and the overall physical settings are not conducive for children of the level. In spite of the fact that resources are crucial to successful implementation of the program there is inadequate budget, absence of teaching-learning materials and equipment.

Research findings reveal that as a result of pre-primary education delivery it is possible to insure the formation of children's identity, prepare children for future stages of their development, reduce misbehaving and crime in childhood and adulthood, to improve education achievements as well as to protect drop-out formal education especially in lower grades. According to Barnett, (2008) a well-designed pre-school education has long-term and progressive effects in school success, including higher achievement test scores, lower rates of grade repetition and higher educational attainment.

Since its start on, as an approach to pre-primary education in Ethiopia, the status of “O-class” program implementation in terms of determinant factors namely; curriculum, qualified teachers, physical and learning environment as well as teaching-learning materials availability have not been researched. No research was conducted so far about “O-class” program to assess its practices and challenges in Oromia National Regional State and in East Shoa Zone in particular.

In general, it seems that due attention has not been given by the concerned bodies for the program to attain its goal. Thus, the overall practical situations, challenges and underlying factors those directly affect program implementation should be assessed. Accordingly, this study is intended to assess the practices and challenges of “O-Class” program in the respective zone.

Issues like definite and particular guideline availability for program implementation, whether or not the curriculum for ECCE has been adapted for the “O-class” program, whether teachers assigned to teach children of the stage are professionally qualified and well trained or not, whether the learning environment is favorable or not and whether necessary learning aids are fulfilled or not were assessed.

In addressing these issues, the following research questions were answered.

1. How is the overall practice of “O class” program in the locality?
2. How is the status of “O class” program teachers in preparing children for formal education?
3. To what extent favorable learning environment and necessary learning aids are fulfilled for the implementation of the program?
4. What major challenges are encountering in the effective implementation of the program?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of “O class” program while the specific objectives were:

- ✓ To examine the descriptiveness of the nomenclature of the program in education system;
- ✓ To investigate program implementation in terms of curriculum, qualified teachers, learning environment and learning aids;
- ✓ To find out the major challenges related to the provision of “O-class” program in public primary schools of East Shoa Zone.

1.4. Significance of The Study

The result of this study will help the Regional Education Bureau, Zonal and Woreda education offices as well as schools by providing insight about the current status of “O-class” program in terms of curriculum, teachers, learning aids and learning environment. It will play crucial role in identifying challenges encountered in implementing “O-Class” and hence, help respective government authorities to use documented information for decision making. It may also help other researchers who will study the effective implementation of “O-Class” program and its impact in the education system.

1.5. Delimitation of the Study

East Shoa Zone has 647 primary schools out of which 588 are owned by government and 543 are located in rural areas. The study is delimited to 33 rural public primary schools in 3 Woredas of the Zone. In terms of content the study delimited to analyze the current status of “O-class” program in terms of only curriculum, teachers, learning environment and learning aids. In addition it was better if it incorporates the overall aspects of “O-class” program, but delimited to only its practice regarding curriculum, teachers, learning aids and learning environment in the locality.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

It is obvious that research works can't be totally free from limitations. For this matter, limitations have occurred in this study, too. Accordingly, it would have been better if the study be conducted in sample public primary schools delivering "O-class" at regional level. But due to time and financial constraints the study has been limited to only selected public rural primary schools those provide "O-class" program in East Shoa Zone.

1.7. Definitions of Key Terms

Pre-school education: The education for children before entering grade one in primary school.

"O-class" program: Intends to benefit vulnerable and disadvantaged children aged 6, who do not have access to kindergarten by annexing to public primary schools for one year. (MoE, 2010)

Ready children: Children's readiness to join formal school. (UNICEF, 2010)

Ready schools: School environment that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school and advance and promote the learning of all children. (UNICEF, 2010)

Ready families: Parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning and development and transition to school. (UNICEF, 2012)

Public primary schools: Schools under the ownership of government.

1.8. Organization of the study

This study is organized in to five chapters; chapter one comprises background of the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, limitation of the study and definition of operational terms. The review of related literature is treated in the second chapter. This chapter presents a brief review of related studies that serve as a ground and evidence to support the basic question of the study. Chapter three

addresses the research design and methods, approaches, procedures and instruments that will be used to achieve the purpose of the study. The fourth chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the field. The last chapter treats the summary of the major findings, conclusions reached and recommendations.

Chapter two

REVIEW OF RELATED LITRATURE

Under this chapter, literatures on overview of ECCE, historical development of Early Childhood Care and Education, an overview of ECCE in Ethiopia, the benefits of preschool/Early child education, determinant factors in pre-primary education and other related issues shall be briefly reviewed.

2.1. An Overview of Early Childhood Education

There is no clear international agreement on the nature and scope of ECCE as a discipline because of its holistic approach in recent day. Depending on the emphasis given to different aspects of the concept, different agencies and countries have given different designations. UNICEF, UNESCO, the Consultative Group on ECCD, OECD and the World Bank are among agencies those gave their designations to the discipline. In the Ethiopian context, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) refers to a holistic and comprehensive approach to policies and programs for children from prenatal to seven years of age, their parents and caregivers, (MoE, 2010).

According to Education International Report (2010), ECCD is service for young children as early childhood education (ECE). This includes all kinds of education taking place before compulsory schooling and provided in different kinds of settings – nurseries, childcare centers, kindergartens, pre-schools and other similar institutions. Similarly, OECD (2013) define Early childhood education (ECE) as all forms of organized and sustained center-based activities – such as preschools, kindergartens and day-care centers – designed to foster learning and emotional and social development in children. UNESCO (2006:15) uses the following definition:

Early childhood care and education support children’s survival growth, development and learning including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal and non-formal settings.

Generally early childhood education is a broad term used to describe any type of educational program that serves children in their preschool years, before they are old enough to enter kindergarten. It is designed specifically for either three-four or five-six year olds, and they may be provided in childcare and daycare or nursery school settings, as well as more conventional preschool or pre-kindergarten classrooms. Early childhood education may consist of any number of activities and experiences designed to aid in the cognitive and social development of preschoolers before they enter elementary school. These programs may be housed in center-based, home-based, or public school settings, and they may be offered part-day, full-day or even on a year-round schedule to include summers. Early childhood education programs also differ in terms of funding and sponsorship, and can be privately run, operated by a local school or faith based organizations.

2.2. Determinant Factors in Pre-Primary Education

According to National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2005), there are standards for serving a good quality of education. Therefore there is the need for curriculum structured for pre-schools, teachers to meet those standards, favorable school environment as well as relevant equipment and materials those contribute to the child's development.

2.2.1. Pre-primary School 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).

Pre-school curriculum should follow and incorporate play as teaching method as Chazzan (2002) explained positive view of the functions of play. Playing and growing are synonymous with life itself; playfulness be speaks creativity and action change and responsibility of transformation. Play activity thus reflects the very existence of the self, that part of the organism that exists both independently and interdependently, that can reflect up on it and be aware of its own existence. In being playful the child attains a degree of autonomy sustained by representations of his inner and outer worlds (as cited in G/Egziabher Assefa (2014).

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).

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. 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. 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 centers 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 child.

The national ECCE curriculum envisions play-based, mother tongue ECCE instruction.

Miller and Mc Dowelle (1993 as cited in Haile, 2010) suggested that quality curriculum in pre-school education demonstrates the following:

- It organized around central themes abilities and personalities
- Employs sound and consistent assessment and documentation procedures: and
- Integrates objectives, methods, material as well as implemented by teachers who have formal training and experiences.

2.2.2. Pre-primary School Teachers

Pre-primary school teachers as key players in young children education have a crucial roles to play in early childhood curriculum implementation. This may include child guidance and discipline, respecting cultural diversity, adopting the appropriate methods of teaching and learning, encouraging self-dependence and so no.

Though the duration and quality of preschool teacher training vary from country to country based on the existing potential for the sector (Foster and Headley's, 1959), the importance of teacher training for preschools has been indicated by various scholars. (Gore and Kourey, 1964) explained that preparation for teaching in nursery school or KG needs a special kind of training, with emphasis on developmental learning and a background understanding of children and the entire program of early childhood education. Professional training helps a teacher of preschools to be competent identifying the possibilities and limitations of different materials with which a school may be equipped, to be skillful in arranging and caring for various materials to be skillful in employing methods which have proved most effective in teaching children and to give the necessary growth experience for children.

Teachers of preschool children are expected to possess knowledge of childcare and psychology, and educational methods teaching young children is both challenging and rewarding since the responsibility is directed to influence the lives of children from day to day during their most formative years. The results of teaching will have long range implications for the child, the family and the nation. So special training is required to make teachers to be smart and well informed to teach young children (Kuzin, 1972).

2.2.3. Pre-Primary Schools' Environment

Most of the pre-schools are located in unsafe places or are not appropriate for pre-school education because the facilities were not in line with the health and developmental needs of young children. Some centers lack potable water and could be environmentally inadequate due to lack of spaces for play and learning because most of them operate in buildings not originally constructed for that purpose. There is lack of children's books, toys and other relevant educational materials in some of these pre-schools. (Tsegai Mulugeta, 2015).

2.2.3.1. The Outdoor Environment

The outdoor physical environment of pre-primary school needs to be safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences for promoting children's learning and development. Appropriate designing and locating the premises for the operation of a service is necessary. A well-designed and richly decorated learning environment not only creates a relaxed and pleasurable atmosphere, but also promotes effective learning for children.

Teachers should pay attention to properly setting up the classroom with the help of a comprehensive and detailed plan of how the classroom can best be arranged. These arrangements aim at providing an environment with adequate space for free movement and easy access to toys and learning materials, and serve the purpose of stimulating children to learn. The kindergarten classroom should be organized into interest areas or centers filled with a variety of

materials and equipment including blocks, dramatic play supplies, science activities, books, art supplies and more.

Moreover, Studer (1998 as cited in Haile, 2010:27) explains that the outdoor environment can offer rich learning experiences not found indoors. The play yard is full of wonderful things for to experiment, discover, and explore. In a well-planned outdoor environment; children do much more than run, climb, and ride bikes. They notice the weather, insects, plants, and everything going on around them. Their curiosity is stimulated as they seek answers to their questions about new discoveries.

The outdoor is also the ideal place to provide experiences that are sometimes considered too messy to do indoors sensory experiences such as measuring floor or mixing sand and water can be more fully explored without the limits of the indoor classroom. For the pre-school child, the freedom to use materials without restriction, always leads to greater levels and understanding (Studer, 1998).

Likewise, Curtis (1998), suggested “the main requirements of outdoor play area to facilitate, learning primarily it must safe and secure with ample space for the children to play freely, preferably with trees, flat grass areas and bushes where children can hide-and-seek and play in the mud.” If the pre-school is attached to an elementary or secondary school then it is important that the play area is separated from the older children. The outdoor equipments should provide children with a wide variety of opportunities for active physical experience wood, boxes, crates, planks, and so on will enable children to build interesting structures which will serve as triggers to imaginative play.

2.2.3.2. The Indoor Learning Environment

It is a learning center where children to play, experiment and create their pace. This environment helps children to develop problem solving skills by

trying different ways of doing things. They expand and refine their language as they talk with and listen to other children. Learning environment is also a place where children learn about their peers as they try out different roles and adjust to work together. It is where children interact through emotional and social aspects. This environment helps children to engage intellectually and socially build positive relationships with others and also develop friendship & regulate their behavior.

Indoor learning environment enhance children's willingness to take risk and make decision confidently. This encourages children to create a suitable, healthy and respected environment and also to build appropriate social behavior & correct use of language and to facilitate positive interaction between children and teachers.

When the learning environment is convenient to children they can talk through conflicts and express their feeling. They can use the guidance to foster children's self regulation appropriate social interaction & social competence (HKSAR, 2006 as cited in Thegay, 2014).

In this aspect Hertzberg and stone (1971) cited in Begna (2010:22) stated the following:

If classroom is well organized, a child can find what he needs to work with. If the room is filled with beauty, a child can learn to care for and value beautiful things. If supplies are readily available, the child learns to choose and share. If a variety of materials are available, then the child learns something about making intelligent choices. If adults show respect for and trust in the child, he will learn to experiment without fear or failure. Both the physical and the emotional elements of the environment influence learning. There is vast difference between a child and living in a warm, welcoming environment and simply "going to school"

Above all, to make the pre-school learning environment child friendly and support the learning an holistic development of the child, teachers and their aides together with the relevant management group need to have appropriate skills, knowledge, awareness and commitment which ultimately requires to have appropriate in training and refreshment (Ayalew, 2011).

2.2.4. Teaching-Learning Materials

Pre-primary schools; including “O-class” program has to be equipped with learning material those helps to ensure the effective implementation of the program. Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources have to be suitable for the purpose. Premises, furniture and equipment need to be safe, clean and well maintained.

Montessori defends the idea that children should be enabled to learn on their own in a set environment where they choose their own materials. The learning environment is set by the teacher in organizing the materials from simple to complex. Teachers should be good observers and only intervene when the child requires guidance. Children to understand the order, harmony and beauty of the nature and they should be please with it. The rules of the nature form the basis of science and art fields. That is why; learning the rules of the nature is the foundation of science (Montessori, 1966 as cited in Thegay, 2014).

In this approach, it is crucial that the child makes mistakes by searching and trying and then, realized his own mistake and corrects it himself. If the children are not able to realize their mistake, this shows that they are not developed enough. When the time comes, the child realized their mistake and corrects it (Temel, 1994 as cited in Thegay, 2014).

Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organized to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments. Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number and organized in ways that

ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the program. Therefore, teaching and learning materials should be convenience to children's in variance aspects such as: they have to be relevance to preschool's curriculum policy and program based on the standards and recreational needs of children.

Materials motivate children and educators to examine their own attitudes and behavior to comprehend their duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges in society and they have to be appropriate to children's age, emotional, intellectual, social and cultural development. Hence children have opportunities to find, use, evaluate and present information to develop the critical capacities and make discerning choices; hence, they are prepared for exercising their freedom of access, with discrimination, as informed and skilled adults. The material's representativeness has to be range in views of all issues (State of South Australia, 2004 as cited in Thegay, 2014).

Children have to chose and use their materials properly. They practiced different tasks with the materials. At the end of time, the child puts the materials back into their places. This behavior becomes habitual after repeating it constantly. Some materials are worked with on a special carpet. It is the child's responsibility to carry these materials to the carpet and back to their shelves after the activity. The child is guided towards that behavior. The child actively learns as he uses these materials. Prepared information is not permanent and efficient in a child's mind.

Materials are meaningful for the child in different aspect: the challenge or the mistake the child experience through exploring should be a part of the material, the shape and usage of the materials should be ordered from simple to complex, Materials should prepare the child for the next learning; Materials provide not the concrete shape of an idea but its abstract form and they are prepared for the child's individual learning (Morrison, 1988 as cited in Thegay, 2014).

According to (Calvert, 1986 as cited in Thegay, 2014) the materials in the classroom have to be natural and reliable. Hence children will complete the task with the materials they have chosen; without interference of adult; after completion of tasks the materials will be put back into their places according to class order. This will develop responsibility and personal discipline.

According to Iseberg and Jalongo (1993 cited in Haile,2010:27), among the major categories of materials of great significance for pre-school children include skill and concept materials (simple car games, books of varies types and puzzles); from gross motor materials (balls, pull toys, riding toys, etc); manipulative materials (building sets, markers, pencils, scissors, etc); constructional materials (blocks, building sets, and wood working materials): self-expressive materials (dolls, dress-up clothes, housekeeping toys, and musical instruments) and natural materials(sticks, leaves, rocks, sand, mud, water etc). Of indoor equipment, chairs must be of such weight and design that can be carried out easily and safely about the room by children. It should permit the child to sit comfortably in relaxed position. Tables, which are square and wide enough to allow children to work opposite each other, encourage conversation and appreciate of the work of others required child-sized and open shelves make it easy for children to have toys and books they need when they need them (Heffernar and Todd 1960; Foster and headly, 1959 as cited in Thegay, 2014)

In general, it is accepted and agreed that the richer and more pleasant pre-school environment provides more opportunities for children learning. Therefore, the pre-school should fulfils at least minimum required standard of environmental condition (site, building, physical setting and the equipment as well as materials) in order to achieve the desired result which is expected of preschool age children.

2.3. Challenges of Early Childhood Care and Education in Pre- Schools in Ethiopia

The importance of early childhood care and education (ECCE) is now widely accepted in international research and development policy. More than half of the world's children are still excluded from pre-primary education, with high income children more likely than low-income children to attend in many countries. Some groups of children are more vulnerable than others, and therefore more services may be needed to ensure their development.

The government of Ethiopian has designed a national framework for ECCE (2010). Within this framework, the state would regulate existing private sector provision. It would also begin to provide low-cost ECCE programs through extending existing government primary schools to provide a reception year. Where this is not possible, some older primary school pupils would be trained as Child-to-Child facilitators in a program of play designed to improve the readiness of younger children to start school. But there is extremely limited government and donor funding available for the plans in the framework. The implementation of ECCE risks placing a significant burden on an already overstretched primary education system. (Young Lives in Ethiopia, 2012)

Ethiopia offers a case study of the opportunities and challenges in developing early care and education (ECCE) services in low-resource settings. The country has been viewed as a success story of Education for All, with the number of children out of school reduced from nearly four in five in 1992 to one in five in 2009. But there are significant challenges in improving the quality of education provision, and an intense focus on primary education has resulted in relatively little attention to ECCE (Young Lives in Ethiopia, 2012)

There is a strong rural-urban division in ECCE provision. In urban areas, there is a diversity of non-governmental providers. Wealthier parents tend to use private preschools, while many poorer parents use faith-based facilities. In

rural areas, the private and non-governmental sectors provide very few pre-schools. The coverage and quality of rural ECCE provision is low because government primary school systems are still being consolidated and lack the resources to offer pre-schooling. Although overall levels of ECCE provision in Ethiopia are low, there are diverse providers. Most are located in urban areas, giving urban families different choices and opportunities for accessing ECCE (Young Lives in Ethiopia, 2012).

Chapter Three

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Under this chapter research design, data source, sample and sampling techniques, instruments of data collection, method of data analysis and ethical considerations have presented.

3.1. Research Design

The main purpose of this study is to assess the practices and challenges of “O-class” program in public primary school in East Shoa Zone. To achieve this purpose, descriptive research design was employed so as to reveal the current implementation status of the program. It was preferred because it helps the researcher to narrate the facts and characteristics of “O-class” program in terms of curriculum, teachers, learning environment and teaching-learning aids. To analyze the collected data descriptive statistics methods mainly frequencies, percentages and means have been used.

3.2. Data Source

Both primary and secondary data sources have been employed in this study.

Primary Data Source: Primary data were collected from the sample respondents (education experts, school principals and “O-class” teachers) to investigate the overall current status of the program as well as to identify the main obstacles hindering the effectiveness of the program.

Secondary Data Source: Secondary data were collected from Regional, Zonal and Woreda Education Statistics Annual Abstracts to examine the gross enrolment rate trend of pre-primary education in general and “O-class” program in particular.

3.3. Sample and sampling techniques

In East Shoa zone, there are 11, 10 Woredas and 1 Administration Town. As indicated in OEB Quick Abstract document of 2010, there are 647 primary schools in the zone out of which 588 are government owned. Among the 588 government primary schools, 454 have opened “O-class” program to deliver pre-primary education.

In order to assess the practices and challenges of “O-class” program in government primary schools in the Zone, 20% of woredas have been selected as samples of the study by cluster sampling technique. 20% schools to which “O-class” programs were annexed were selected as samples of the study from 164 government primary schools in selected woredas as suggested by Gay & Diehl, (1992) for descriptive survey. Accordingly 3 Woredas and 33 schools to which “O-class” programs were annexed have been selected. All “O-class” teachers and school principals in all selected schools as well as Regional, Zonal and Woreda education experts have been selected by using availability sampling technique. In general; 33 “O-class” teachers, 33 school principals and 5 education expert who were from Regional Education Bureau, from Zonal education office and 3 from Woreda education offices. Totally, 71 participants were selected and participated in the study to gain information about the overall status of “O- class” implementation in the locality.

3.4. Instruments of Data Collection

In this study, the data gathering instruments used will be both close and open-ended questionnaires, checklist for document analysis, checklist for observation and interview questions.

3.4.1. Questionnaires

Questionnaires are considered as the heart of a survey operation and to collect data through it is relatively cheap and economical (Kothari, 2004). Both closed

and open ended questions have been incorporated in the questionnaires to be responded by “O-class” teachers and school principals. The questionnaires were adopted and modified based on the existing relevant review literatures, knowledge and experience of the researcher. They were designed on the basis of National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education in Ethiopia to get hold of information about curriculum, teachers and major problems encountered while “O-class” program has been implemented.

The first part of the questionnaires incorporates personal information of the respondents which includes their organization, position/title/career, sex, age, education level and work experience. The second part of the questionnaires are employed with typical form of fixed response rating by using likert scale that requires the respondents to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with set of statements dealing with the mentioned issues. The items in the questionnaire are designed to be rated on a five point likert scale types (strongly agree, agree, moderate, disagree and strongly disagree). Respondents will be asked to make tick (√) mark to show their level of agreement for each statement in the space provided. The open ended parts of the questionnaire are formulated so as to capture respondents’ views and opinion on the naming, curriculum, guideline, teachers’ qualification, challenges and possible solutions for the challenges.

3.4.2. Interview

Semi-structured interviews have been conducted by using sets of mixed predetermined and not pre-determined questions to collect information. In this regard, semi-structured interview questions were designed on the bases of directions and content to be discussed that let participants free to elaborate their view or take the interview in new but related directions. It was preferred because of its being more economical and requiring relatively lesser skill on the part of the interviewer. The interviews have been undertaken with 5 interviewees from Regional Education Bureau, Zonal and Woreda education

offices who are pre-primary education professionals in separate at their office. All interviewees were told about the purpose of the study and requested to spend few minutes for the interview. The main content of the interview questions were about naming of the program, current status of the program in terms of curriculum, teachers, environment and materials. In addition interviewees' responses about attention given by the concerned bodies and problems encountering the effective implementation of the program were other focusing areas of the interviews. The responses obtained for the interviewees have been analyzed qualitatively and described by relating with what has been stated in the policy guideline. The reason for using this interview is for triangulating the information obtained from other participants about the overall scheme of "O-class" program in the respective Zone.

3.4.3.Observation

A checklist is a simple device consisting of items which are thought by the researcher to be relevant to the problem being identified and researched (Koul, 1996). Accordingly, to obtain information through observing schools those have been delivering education for children through "O-class" program, semi-structured observation checklists were prepared so as to get information concerning favorability of learning environment and the fulfillment of learning aids for the effective implementation of the program. Among the 33 sample schools 22 schools have observed by the researcher. The observation were conducted with the guidance of school principals and "o-class" teachers based on the questions raised by the researchers about the existence of separated, safe and secured play area with playing equipments like frames and locally made swings and seesaws, the environmental conditions; being conducive of the site, building and the overall physical setting of the school environment for children of the level. Beside these, the existence of playing materials those prepared from locally available materials, whether the classrooms were well-designed and decorated. At the end, the information obtained through

observation were analyzed and crosschecked with those obtained from other sources.

3.4.4.Document Analysis

A document is a text-based file that may include primary data (collected by the researcher) or secondary data (collected and archived or published by others) as well as photographs, charts, and other visual materials (*Jean J. Schensul*). In this study data obtained through document analysis were from secondary source of data to supplement and triangulate the data or information collected through various means mentioned above. To secure facts and figures along with gross enrolment rate trends and other related data, different documents have been analyzed. The first one is The National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ethiopia to triangulate the findings with what have been stated in the document. The second one is regional, zonal and woreda level Education Statistics Annual Abstracts so as to analyze gross enrolment rate trends and other related data about pre-primary education in general and “O-class” program in particular. Finally, analysis has been made by correlating the findings with the data obtained for these documents.

3.5. Data Collection Procedures

As mentioned above different data gathering instruments have been used to collect information for the study. To collect these data I followed different procedures so as to make the data collection process easy and effective.

Data using questionnaires were gathered after the completion of pilot test and necessary corrections have made. The pilot survey has conducted by distributing questionnaires for two “O-class” teachers and two school principals participated from unstamped schools in the surrounding area to identify, whether the questionnaires were easily understandable as well as if there were any vague and confusing questions in the questionnaires. In

addition it was intended to check whether the questionnaires have the potential to get the required data as expected. After the result of the pilot has judged whether the questionnaires were easily understandable or not corrections were made. For example; the item “The name given to the program, "O-Class", is convenient and relevant” has been replaced by “The naming used for the program called “O-class” is meaning full and acceptable” because of its vagueness. After corrections have made, the final copies of the questionnaire were printed. The work of distribution and collection of the questionnaires has been done by the researcher himself and some others colleagues accompanied by my close follow up to give clarification and support in case of difficulties.

The interviews were employed to gather data from the regional education bureau, zonal and woreda education offices education experts. The information obtain from the participants have been used to triangulate what have been obtained from other sources. All interviews were held based on the agreement of the participants at their comfortable time and taken place thoroughly and solely accomplished by the researcher himself.

The document analysis has been taken place by the researcher through getting access for the Education Statistics Annual Abstracts prepared by regional EMIS experts. It was done to analyze the trend of “O-class” enrolment and gross enrolment by region, zone and woreda. Beside this The National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ethiopia was referred to triangulate the findings with the policy.

School observations have been held by the researcher so as to check whether the learning environment including class rooms for “O-class” children are favorable or not. In addition the observation checklist is designed to observe the fulfillment of different learning aids needed for the children of the level.

3.6. Method of data analysis

Depending on the nature of basic questions, the quantitative data were analyzed using mainly descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages,

means and tables. Qualitative information obtained from open-ended questionnaires as well as interviews and observation were first edited, coded and finally analyzed across the different themes those emerged from the data as well as the basic questions of the study. They were discussed and interpreted qualitatively through narration using the themes obtained from the interviews and observations. In addition data obtained from documents were organized through tables and graphs and analyzed by narrating the trend of gross enrolment and enrolment rate of pre-primary education in general and “O-class” program in particular.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethics is one of the most crucial areas of the research. To make the process simple and ethical first of all letter for support was given from Addis Ababa University and then East Shoa Zone Education office to have contacted so as to get permission to conduct the research in those woredas and schools in the respective zone. Second, strong and positive interaction has been made between the researcher and sample population, so as to make awareness about the purpose of the research and all the information from all participants have to keep confidential. All of the participants were personally contacted and discussions were held on the purpose of the study in order to make sure that the participants are willing to fill the questionnaires of the study. They were told that the information obtained kept confidential.

Since respect to all participants in the research is mandatory in conducting this study, while conducting it the kindness of the participants has been considered. The participants were not forced to give their response without their own willingness. Otherwise, giving responses were based on the time agreed up on with them and as preferred by them. Fairness or impartiality was also the main issue considered as ethical condition while conducting this research.

Chapter Four

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Under this chapter data presentation, data analysis and data interpretations have been dealt. Mainly this chapter encompasses the respondents' characteristics and analysis of the major determinant factors those were addressed under the basic research questions of the study. Accordingly, the first part of the chapter deals with the characteristics and background of the sample population involved in the study in terms of sex, age, position/career, education level and work experience. The second part of the chapter deals with the analysis of issues those have direct impact on the effective implementation of "O-class" program in government schools.

4.1. Characteristics of Respondents and Response Rates

To collect data for conducting the study the participants involved were school principals, "O-class" teachers and education professional who engaged in pre-primary education at different levels. Among the 33 school principals and 33 "O-class" teachers who receive the questionnaires to fill, all (100%) have returned the questionnaires. On the other hand, all the 5 (100%) interviewees have been interviewed where one was from Regional Education Bureau, one was from Zonal Education and the rest three were from Woreda education offices. The characteristics and background of the sample population involved to respond their responses through questionnaires in the study have discussed below in terms of sex, age, position/career, education level and work experience.

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents and their Response Rates

Respondents' profile	School Principals		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1. sex				
Male	27	81.8	11	33.3
Female	6	18.2	22	66.7
Total	33	100.0	33	100.0
2. Age				
Below 20 years	0	0.0	4	12.1
21-25 years	7	21.2	17	51.5
26-30 years	14	42.4	11	33.3
31- 35 years	6	18.2	1	3.0
36- 40 years	6	18.2	0	0.0
above 40 years	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	33	100.0	33	100.0
3. Qualification				
Below Diploma	0	0.0	25	75.8
Diploma	8	24.2	8	24.2
First Degree	20	60.6	0	0.0
Masters & above	5	15.2	0	0.0
Total	33	100.0	33	100.0
4. Total service				
Below 5 years	1	3.0	28	84.8
6-10 years	15	45.5	3	9.1
11-15 years	13	39.4	2	6.1
16-20 years	3	9.1	0	0.0
above 20 years	1	3.0	0	0.0
Total	33	100.0	33	100.0

As indicated in table 1, among 33 teachers participated in the study 22 (67.7%) were females, and only 11 (33.3%) were males. In the school principals' category only 6 (18.2%) were females and the majority 27 (81.8%) were males. These data reveal that the participation of female teachers in teaching "O-classes" is much higher than that of males which fits with the standard for pre-school education as suggested by MoE (2009). On the other hand males' participation in leading schools is much higher than that of females and the data indicates the relative less participation of females in leading school.

Respondents' profile regarding their age has been interpreted as one characteristic of respondents. Accordingly, among 33 "O-class" teachers 4 (12.2%), 17 (51.5%), 11 (33.3%) and only 1 (3.0%) were in the age category of

below 20, 21-25, 26-30 and 31-35 years respectively. No teacher is leveled in the category of above 35 years old. From these data it is possible to conclude that the majority of sample “O-class” teachers were in the category of productive age and in a position to prepare children for their future formal education. On the other hand among 33 school principals 7 (21.2%), 14 (42.4%), 6 (18.2%) and 6 (18.2%) were in the age category of 21-25, 26-30, 31-35 and 36-40 years respectively. No school principal is leveled in the category of below 20 and above 41 years old. These data shows that most of the sample school principals 14 (42.4%) were in the age category of 26-30 years. This implies that majority of the respondent teachers and principals were young and in their productive age.

The other demographic variable indicated in the table is participants’ level of education. As presented in the table among 33 principals participated in the study 8 (24%), 20 (61%), and 5 (15%) have diploma, first degree and second degree respectively. No principal was found with qualification below diploma. Regarding “O-class” teachers’ education level 25 (76%) and 8 (24%) have below diploma and diploma education level respectively. No “O-class” teacher was found with education level of first degree and above. This implies that the education level of the principals is almost to the standard whereas “O-class” teachers’ qualification was found as below the minimum standard of MoE which states that the minimum standard professional qualification of pre-school teachers is diploma.

Regarding school principals’ work experience 1 (3.0%), 15 (45.5%), 13 (39.4%), 3 (9.1%) and 1 (3.0%) school principals were with work experience of below 5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years and above 21 years respectively. The data reveal that most of the school principals have work experience between 11 and 20 years which shows that they were well experienced. Concerning the work experience of “O-class” teachers 28 (84.8%), 3 (9.1%) and 5 (6.1%) were responded as their work experience is less than five years, 6-10 years and 11-15 years respectively. No “O-class” teacher has found having

work experience above 16 years. The data reveal that the majority of the teachers were with less work experience. From all the above respondents' characteristics data the researcher have concluded that the sample populations were diverse and representative.

Regarding the interviewees profile, among the 5 interviewees 3 (60.0%) were males and 2 (40%) were females. Concerning their professional qualification only one respondent has Masters and three (60.0%) respondents were with first degree. Only one respondent has diploma education level. These profiles of interviewees reveal that most of the respondents especially the Regional expert have education preparation to lead the pre-primary education including "O-class" program.

4.2. Naming/Nomenclature of the Program

Different psychologist, educationists and policy makers have given different names to the education which is given to age of three to six years old children namely; nursery school education, kindergarten education and pre-primary education etc. In the case of Ethiopia, education given to this group of children includes kindergartens, "O class" and child to child programs. Among these approaches "O-Class" program is the most popular program in which rural government primary schools deliver it for one-year. It is mainly organized for the benefit of disadvantaged children of age 6, who do not have access to kindergarten before they enter grade one.

Concerning the naming of the program, schools principals and "O-class" teachers in sample schools have asked whether the name used for the program, which is called "O-class", is meaning full and acceptable or not in their respective schools. In addition, three options to call the program have proposed to be chosen by principals and teachers. The education experts at different level also asked whether they know why and how this naming came to exist and whether they have any suitable naming for the program too. The

issues of nomenclature for the program have discussed below based the data obtained from the respondents.

Table 2: The mean value of school principals about nomenclature of “O-class” Program

Item	Principals’ responses										
	Frequency					Percentage					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
The naming used for the program called “O-class” is meaning full and acceptable	9	13	3	4	4	27.3	39.4	9.1	12.1	12.1	2.42

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=moderate, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

As showed in table 2 the responses obtained from 33 school principals regarding the meaningfulness and acceptability of the name “O-class” for the program were rated ‘disagree’ with an aggregate mean value of 2.42. Specifically 9 (27.3%), 13 (39.4%), 3 (9.1%) 4 (12.1%) and again 4 (12.1%) of the school principals responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively. These data reveal that the naming used for the program, “O-class” is not meaning full and not accepted by the majority 22 (66.7%) of school principals.

Table 3: The mean value of “O-class” teachers about Nomenclature of “O-class” Program

Item	“O-class” teachers’ responses										
	Frequency					Percentage					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
The naming used for the program called “O-class” is meaning full and acceptable	8	12	9	2	2	24.2	36.4	27.3	6.1	6.1	2.33

It have been indicated in table 3 regarding the meaningfulness and acceptability of the name “O-class” for the program that 1 (24.2%), 12 (36.4%), 9 (27.3%) 2 (6.1%) and 2 (6.1%) of “O-class” teachers responded strongly

disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively with an aggregate mean value of 2.33 which were rated ‘disagree’. This implies that O-class” teachers are not interested with the naming of the program.

Table 4: Interviewees’ Responses about Naming/Nomenclature

Item	Frequency			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Do you know why/how it is called “O-class?	4	1	5	80	20	100.0
Is the naming suitable and meaning full for you?	0	5	5	0	100	100.0
Do you have other option to call?	3	2	5	60	40	100.0

Table 4 indicates data from interviewees’ responses those were from education bureau and education offices at zonal and woreda level. The first question raised by the interviewer was to give their responses about whether they know why and how it is called “O-class. Accordingly 4(80%) respondents responded that they know why and how it is called “O-class”.

One interviewee from Woerda education office said that “...I remember that it was previously called “Zero class” and later on its name has been changed to “O-class” by simply changing zero to O. I think the name was given because of its being the number before one and assigned for education of children of the level before they inter grade one”. Among the five interviewees one respondent didn’t know why and how it is call “O-class”. Concerning the meaning fullness and suitability of the naming, all (100%) interviewees agreed that the naming given to the program is not suitable and not meaning full.

They have also asked whether they have any other option to call education of the level in primary schools and their response were found vary from one another. Accordingly, 3 (60%) interviewees have responded as they have other option to name it and 2 (40%) said that they have no other option to name it. From all the responses obtained from the interviewees concerning the naming of the program it is found that the name “O-class” is not expressive and needs to be changed.

Table 5: Proposed Naming/ Nomenclature for the program

Proposed Naming for the program	Principals		Teachers	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Preparedness class	8	24	10	30
Before school class	12	36	5	15
School Readiness Class	13	39	18	55
Total	33	100	33	100

Concerning the proposed names to call the program, the data obtained from the school principals and “O-class” teachers indicated in table 5 show that 13 (39%), 12 (36%) and 8(24%) school principals preferred the nomenclature for the program to be School Readiness Class, Before School Class and Preparedness Class respectively. The preference of the participant teaches reveal that 18 (55%), 5(15%) and 10(30%) were agreed to call the program School Readiness Class, Before School Class and Preparedness Class respectively. The data obtained from both categories imply that the majority of the respondents preferred the former nomenclature of the program needs to be changed to School Readiness Class (SRC).

4.3. Analysis of Determinant Factors for Effective Implementation of the Program

4.3.1. Curriculum and Guideline

Curriculum is the what and how of any educational system. It is the vehicle through which any educational programs can be successfully implemented. Effective curriculum provides specific guidance that gives clear direction to the user but allows for flexibility in adapting to special situations as needed. The ECE curriculum is an important written plan that includes goals for children’s development and learning, experiences through which they will achieve the goals, what staff and parents do to help children achieve the goals and, the materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum (National Centre on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL, 2012). 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).

Curriculum for pre-primary education in general and for "O-class" program in particular is a document for acquiring knowledge and skills to children of the stage and it is also a plan for learning experiences through which knowledge and skills will be achieved. The development of curriculum, guidelines and standards, provision of training service for preschool education and development of play and teaching materials are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The Regional Education Bureau and respective Education Offices are responsible for the adaptation of the curriculum, guidelines and standards.

As stated in the Guidelines for ECCE in Ethiopia (MoE, 2010), the curriculum to be used should be designed to meet the holistic needs of children. Only the government-approved curriculum should be used in all pre-schools and should be adapted to the local context. The curriculum should be used as a guide for incorporating developmentally appropriate content, concepts and activities in the pre-school programs including "O-class. The curriculum should give children an opportunity to practice skills that will enable them to function effectively in the society.

All teaching and learning activities should be consistent with the approved pre-school curriculum and should be readily available to all teachers in the pre-schools including "O-class" teachers because of its being fundamental part that motivates teachers. They use it as a guide to prepare teaching and play materials from locally available materials. In general it is undeniable that curriculum provides momentum that makes the program to be implemented effectively which is greatly influenced by its quality.

School principals and “O-class” teachers involved in this study have asked whether the existing ECCE curriculum has been adapted for “O-class” program and whether teaching children of the stage is based on the curriculum developed for the program too. In addition they have been asked that whether independent curriculum for “O-class” program that acknowledges the importance of play and allowing children to be active learners is needed. Education experts those work directly in the area of pre-school education at different level were interviewed regarding the overall status of per-school education curriculum in general and for “O-class” program in particular. Responses for participants of the study regarding curriculum and guideline issues for the program have discussed below.

Table 6: The mean value of School Principals about Curriculum and Guideline for the Program

Items	Responses						Mean
		Rating Scale					
		1	2	3	4	5	
Guideline that helps practitioners and teachers to implement the program effectively exists in school	Frequency	14	11	7	1	0	1.8
	Percentage	42.4	33.3	21.2	3.0	0.0	
A guideline that helps practitioners and teachers to implement the program effectively is mandatory to exist	Frequency	0	1	2	8	22	4.5
	Percentage	0.0	3.0	6.1	24.2	66.7	
The existing ECCE curriculum is adapted for “O-class” program	Frequency	11	16	4	1	1	1.9
	Percentage	33.3	48.5	12.1	3.0	3.0	
Teaching children of the stage is based on the curriculum developed for the program	Frequency	13	14	3	2	1	1.9
	Percentage	39.4	42.4	9.1	6.1	3.0	
Independent curriculum for “O-class” program that acknowledges the importance of play and allowing children to be active learners is needed	Frequency	4	1	6	22	4	4.4
	Percentage	12.1	3.0	18.2	66.7	12.1	

Responses obtained from 33 school principals were presented in table 6 concerning “O-class” program curriculum and guideline. Accordingly the school principals’ responses about the item that state the existence of guideline that helps practitioners and teachers to implement the program effectively in schools were rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 1.8. Specifically 14 (42.4%), 11 (33.3%), 7 (21.2%), 1 (3.0%) and 0 (0.0%) school principals were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively concerning the issue. Regarding the existence of the guideline is mandatory 0 (0.0%), 1 (3.0%), 2 (6.1%), 8 (24.2%) and 22 (66.7%) school principals were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively that rated “agree” with an aggregate mean value of 4.5. This implies that school principals have been trying to implement the program in schools without guideline and it needs to be adapted and disseminated to schools.

In the same table responses about curriculum for the program have indicated. Accordingly school principals’ responses about whether the existing ECCE curriculum have been adapted or not for “O-class” program were rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 1.9. Among the 33 school principals 11 (33.3%), 16 (48.5%), 4 (12.1%), 1 (3.0%) and 1 (3.0%) were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively about the issue. Concerning the item about teaching children of the stage is taking place based on the curriculum developed for the program or not 13 (39.4%), 14 (42.4%), 3 (9.1%), 2 (6.1%) and 1 (3.0%) were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively which was rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 1.9. Concerning the need for independent curriculum for “O-class” program that acknowledges the importance of play and allowing children to be active learners, the school principals responded as strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree which were by 4 (12.1%), 1 (3.0%), 6 (18.2%), 22 (66.7%) and 4

(12.1%) respectively. From these data it is possible to rate responses about the item to “agree” with an aggregate mean value of 4.4.

Table 7: Mean Value of “O-class” Teachers about Curriculum and Guideline

Items	Responses						Mean
		Rating Scale					
		1	2	3	4	5	
Guideline that helps practitioners and teachers to implement the program effectively exists in school	Frequency	11	11	5	0	6	2.4
	Percentage	33.3	33.3	15.2	0.0	18.2	
A guideline that helps practitioners and teachers to implement the program effectively is mandatory to exist	Frequency	3	2	0	5	23	4.4
	Percentage	9.1	6.1	0.0	15.2	69.7	
The existing ECCE curriculum is adapted for “O-class” program	Frequency	20	9	1	2	1	1.6
	Percentage	60.6	27.3	3.0	6.1	3.0	
Teaching children of the stage is based on the curriculum developed for the program	Frequency	16	10	6	0	1	1.8
	Percentage	48.5	30.3	18.2	0.0	3.0	
Independent curriculum for “O-class” program that acknowledges the importance of play and allowing children to be active learners is needed	Frequency	2	1	7	23	2	4.5
	Percentage	6.1	3.0	21.2	69.7	6.1	

Table 7 shows the responses obtained from 33 “O-class” teachers about “O-class” program curriculum and guideline. Accordingly responses obtained from “O-class” teachers about the item that states whether or not guideline that helps practitioners and teachers to implement the program effectively exists in school were rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 2.4. Specifically 11 (33.3%), 11 (33.3%), 5 (15.2%), 0 (0.0%) and 6 (18.2%) “O-class” teachers were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively. Concerning the existence of the guideline is mandatory 3 (9.1%), 2 (6.1%), 0 (0.0%), 5 (15.2%) and 23 (69.7%) “O-class”

teachers were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively that rated “agree” with an aggregate mean value of 4.4. This also implies that “O-class” teachers have been teaching the children in schools without guideline and it needs to be adapted and disseminated to schools.

In the same table responses gained from “O-class” teachers about curriculum for the program have indicated. Accordingly “O-class” teachers’ responses about the item whether or not the existing ECCE curriculum have been adapted for “O-class” program and available in their schools were rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 1.6. Among the 33 “O-class” teachers 20 (60.6%), 9 (27.3%), 1 (3.0%) 2 (6.1%), and 1 (3.0%) were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively about the issue. Concerning the item about whether or not teaching children of the stage is taking place based on the curriculum developed for the program 16 (48.5%), 10 (30.3%), 6 (18.2%), 0 (0.0%) and 1 (3.0%) were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively which was rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 1.8. About the item that focuses on the need for independent curriculum for “O-class” program that acknowledges the importance of play and allowing children to be active learners, they responded as strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree which were obtained from 4 (12.1%), 1 (3.0%), 6 (18.2%), 22 (66.7%) and 4 (12.1%) “O-class” teachers respectively. From these data it is possible to rate the item to “strongly agree” with an aggregate mean value of 4.5.

Responses obtained from the interviewees concerning both guideline and curriculum for the program also reveal that there was problem regarding both guideline and curriculum. Accordingly; the regional education expert said that “I believe that guideline and curriculum for the program are mandatory to exist in every primary school in the region. Although there is a guideline and curriculum for pre-primary education in general prepared by the Ministry of

Education, they have not been adapted for “O-class” program yet and disseminated to schools. But recently the bureau has prepared the curriculum in Afan Oromo and it is on process to be published.” Education experts from Zonal and Woreda education offices have responded that the guideline and curriculum are not available in schools. One respondent from Woreda education office said “attention has not been given by the government for education of the level. The only responsible body is the regional education bureau for the development and dissemination of guideline and curriculum for the program. But we have no either of the two documents to disseminate to schools. Teachers of the level in our woreda have been working without knowing what to teach. Thus it is possible to say they have been not teaching but keeping the children”

The data gained through different data gathering instruments and analyzed about curriculum and guideline for the program reveal that there is absence of adapted curriculum in almost all schools taken as sample of the study and they were in need of having relevant curriculum and guideline. Due to the absence of the curriculum and guideline, teachers assigned to teach children of the level were forced to deliver the education for the children by their own effort and their own way that differs from school to school and woreda to woreda.

4.3.2. Teachers of “O-Class” Program

Teachers are among the most important inputs into the educational system and, therefore, the presence of enough and qualified teachers is so fundamental in enhancing good provision of education in pre-primary schools In general and “O-class” program in particular. Pre-school teachers as key players in young children education have a crucial roles to play in early childhood curriculum implementation. This may include child guidance and discipline, respecting cultural diversity, adopting the appropriate methods of teaching and learning, encouraging self-dependence and many.

According to NAEYC (2005), there are standards for serving a good quality of education which teachers must meet. The International Union of Education in Early Childhood and the National Association for The Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommended that kindergarten teachers must have university level preparation with a study period in a college program that is between four to six years. According to the Guidelines for ECCE in Ethiopia (MoE, 2010), teachers of the stage should hold a 10 months pre-school teacher training course certificate from the Teacher Education Institute or have attended 2 months course to upgrade their skills and knowledge, especially in the field of “active learning of young children”. Recently the MoE set standard for pre-primary education including “O-class” that the minimum qualification of teachers of the stage must be diploma in pre-primary education.

Table 8: Mean Values of School Principals about “O-Class” Teachers

Items	Responses						Mean
	Rating Scale						
	1	2	3	4	5		
Teachers/Caregivers of the program have college level preparation with appropriate study period (diploma in pre-primary education/”O-class” program)	Frequency	18	11	1	0	3	1.8
	Percentage	54.5	33.3	3.0	0.0	9.1	
Teachers/Caregivers of the program are with special kind of training with special emphasis on the entire program of early childhood education	Frequency	18	10	4	1	0	1.6
	Percentage	54.5	30.3	12.1	3.0	0.0	
Teachers/Caregivers of the program possess knowledge of childcare, psychology and educational methods of teaching children	Frequency	15	13	4	1	0	1.7
	Percentage	45.5	39.4	12.1	3.0	0.0	
Teachers/Caregivers assigned to teach “O-class” are among teaches trained for primary schools	Frequency	17	2	9	1	4	2.2
	Percentage	51.5	6.1	27.3	3.0	12.1	
Teachers/Caregivers of the program acquire frequent on job-training and orientation about "O-Class" program	Frequency	17	11	1	3	1	1.8
	Percentage	51.5	33.3	3.0	9.1	3.0	

According to data collected from the respondents and organized in the table 8 school principals have forwarded their agreement or disagreement. Their responses about whether “O-class” teachers have college level preparation with appropriate study period (diploma in pre-primary education) or not were rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 1.8. As indicated in the table, 18 (54.5%), 11 (33.3%), 1 (3.0%), 0 (0.0%) and 3 (9.1%) school principals were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively. Regarding the special kind of training with special emphasis on the entire program of early childhood education of the teachers, responses obtained from school principals showed that 18 (54.5%), 10 (30.3%), 4 (12.1%) 1 (3.0%) and 0 (0.0%) school principals were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively which was rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 1.6.

Responses from school principals about the item which elaborate whether the teachers possess knowledge of childcare, psychology and educational methods of teaching children showed that 18 (54.5%), 13 (39.4%), 4 (12.1%), 1 (3.0%) and 0 (0.0%) school principals have responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively that rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 1.7. School principals’ have also asked to respond for the idea whether the assignment of “O-class” teachers is carried out among teachers trained to teach primary education or not. Accordingly 17 (51.7%), 2 (6.1%), 9 (27.3%) 1 (3.0%) and 4 (12.1%) school principals were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively which rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 2.2. Finally they have asked whether teachers of the level have acquired frequent on job-training and orientation about "O-Class" program. The responses from school principals were again rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 1.8. Regarding the issue 17 (51.7%), 11 (33.3%), 1 (3.0%) 3 (9.1%) and 1 (3.0%) school principals were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively.

Questions were also forwarded for “O-class” teachers about whether teachers of the program have college level preparation with special kind of training and with special emphasis on the entire program of early childhood education. Beside this they have asked whether they possess knowledge of childcare, psychology and educational methods of teaching children as well as whether they acquire frequent on job-training and orientation about the program. Their responses regarding these questions have analyzed in table 10.

Table 9: Mean Values of “O-Class” Teachers about Teachers of the Program

Items	Responses						Mean
		Rating Scale					
		1	2	3	4	5	
Teachers/Caregivers of the program have college level preparation with appropriate study period (diploma in pre-primary education/”O-class” program)	Frequency	15	9	3	2	4	1.8
	Percentage	45.5	27.3	9.1	6.1	12.1	
Teachers/Caregivers of the program are with special kind of training with special emphasis on the entire program of early childhood education	Frequency	19	6	2	2	4	1.6
	Percentage	57.6	18.2	6.1	6.1	12.1	
Teachers/Caregivers of the program possess knowledge of childcare, psychology and educational methods of teaching children	Frequency	17	5	3	4	4	1.7
	Percentage	51.5	15.2	9.1	12.1	12.1	
Teachers/Caregivers assigned to teach “O-class” are among teaches trained for primary schools	Frequency	15	5	2	2	9	2.2
	Percentage	45.5	15.2	6.1	6.1	27.3	
Teachers/Caregivers of the program acquire frequent on job-training and orientation about "O-Class" program	Frequency	14	10	3	0	6	1.8
	Percentage	42.4	30.3	9.1	0.0	18.2	

Table 9 shows the responses of “O-class” teachers about teaches themselves. Accordingly 15 (45.5%), 9 (27.3%), 3 (9.1%) 2 (6.1%) and 4 (12.1%) “O-class” teachers were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and

strongly agree respectively about whether “O-class” teachers have college level preparation with appropriate study period (diploma in pre-primary education) or not which finally rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 2.1. As indicated in the table, 19 (57.6%), 6 (18.2%), 2 (6.1%), 2 (6.1%), and 4 (12.1%) “O-class” teachers were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively about the item focusing on the special kind of training with special emphasis on the entire program of early childhood education of the teachers which was rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 2.0. This data implies that teachers of the level have no at list diploma as stated by the Ministry of Education.

Responses from “O-class” teachers about the item which elaborates whether the teachers possess knowledge of childcare, psychology and educational methods of teaching children revealed that 17 (51.5%), 5 (15.2%), 3 (9.1%) 4 (12.1%), and 4 (12.1%), “O-class” teachers have responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively that rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 2.2. They have also asked to respond for the idea whether the assignment of “O-class” teachers is carried out among teachers trained to teach primary education or not. Accordingly 15 (45.5%), 5 (12.2%), 2 (6.1%), 2 (6.1%) and 9 (27.3%) “O-class” teachers were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively which rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 2.5. This implies that assigning teachers of primary education to “O-classes” have been improved. The responses they have forwarded for the item which states whether teachers of the level have acquired frequent on job-training and orientation about "O-Class" program showed that 14 (45.5%), 10 (30.3%), 3 (9.1%), 0 (0.0%) and 6 (18.2%) “O-class” teachers were responded strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree respectively which again rated “disagree” with an aggregate mean value of 2.2.

Beside these, school principals and “O-class” teachers have responded their view through open ended question that states of what qualification the

teachers of “O-class” program are in their school, Accordingly; most of them reply that the teachers assigned to teach children of the stage in schools were grade 10 complete students hired as facilitators and most of them have given chance to upgrade their education level to diploma in summer program by government but training they have been engaged in was no preparing them to teach pre-primary education after graduation. Rather they have been assigned to teach grade 1-4 after graduation in the school or transferred to other school where there is shortage of grade 1-4 grades in the district.

The other question school principals and “O-class” teachers asked through open ended questionnaire was regarding their suggestion in the areas of teachers training and assignment for the program. Most of school principals and “O-class” teachers responded that though it is base for every education of children, teachers of the level have to have at list diploma in pre-primary education with special kind of training which enables them to possess knowledge of childcare, psychology and educational methods of teaching children.

Responses from education experts at different level about “O-class” teachers also reveal that there were problems in training and assignment of professionally qualified teachers in schools. One participant the woreda education office expert said “they are not teachers. Rather it is better to say they are still students. Because they come to primary schools to teach “O-classes” directly from high schools. Even they were students who couldn’t pass to preparatory schools. So, it is possible to say they are no teaching but keeping children in primary schools”.

In general, it is possible to underline from the above analysis that issues related to teachers of “O-class” have been in problem and need immediate remedial actions by the respective concerned bodies.

4.3.3. Learning Environment

A well organized physical environment setting where pre-primary education, including “O-class”, takes place creates conditions for the overall well-being of the children. It has a positive effect on the personality of children only if it can fully meet their psychological, emotional and physical needs. Its setting affects the feelings of satisfaction, performance and fatigue in movement, play, learning and work.

In order to promote children’s learning and development, the physical environment of pre-primary school in general and “O-Class” in particular needs to be safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences. The learning environment should provide adequate opportunity for interactions among children as well as between children and adults. The existence of well-designed and richly decorated learning environment ensures not only to create a relaxed and pleasurable atmosphere, but also effective learning for children. Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources have to be suitable and need to be safe, clean and well maintained.

According to Moreover, Studer (1998 as cited in Haile, 2010:27), in a well planned outdoor environment; children do much more than run, climb, and ride bikes. They notice the weather, insects, plants and everything going on around them. Their interest is stimulated as they seek answers to their questions about new discoveries.

As stated in the Guidelines for ECCE in Ethiopia (MoE, 2010), the environment where per-school education takes place should be attractive, pleasant and physically safe for children. It should be fenced and has to be made as a place where children learn, run and play games together with other children. Basic sanitation facilities like latrine and water for hand washing need to be available. Outdoor playing equipments like climbing frames and locally made swings and seesaws must be available.

Table 10: Percentage of Schools with Better Learning Environment

Learning Environment	No of schools Observed	No of schools Full fill the criteria	Percentage
The suitability of environmental conditions; site, building and the overall physical setting	22	3	13.6
The existence of separated, safe and secured compound for the children with basic sanitation facilities like water and toilet	22	2	9.1
The existence of secured play area with playing equipments like frames and locally made swings and seesaws	22	4	18.2
The classroom condition is well-designed and decorated having desks, chairs, tables, cupboards etc	22	4	18.2

It is indicated in table 10 that among the 33 sample schools selected for the purpose of this study, observation have been taken place by the researcher in 22 (66.7%) schools. The data and information obtained through the observations in sample schools reveal that, among the 22 observed schools only 3 (13.6%) schools have relatively suitable environmental conditions; site, building and the overall physical setting to deliver education for the children of the stage. In other schools the overall physical settings are found as they are not suitable for the children of the stage. Only 2 (9.1%) schools have separated, safe and secured compound for the children of the stage. Amazingly, only one school has separate basic sanitation facilities like latrine and water in the separated compound for “O-class” children. The rest schools observed do not have separated compound and facilities for “O-class” children and the children are forced to use facilities those were prepared for primary school children. Yet, one school has already secured budget from the local community and started to build separate class room and on the way to full fill outdoor equipments.

Regarding the outdoor playing equipments among the observed 22 schools only 4 schools (18.2%) have outdoor playing equipments like climbing frames and locally made swings and seesaws for the children in the school compounds. The rest 18 schools (81.8%) have no outdoor playing equipments like climbing frames and locally made swings and seesaws for the children to play with. Concerning the class rooms for “O-class” students, among the observed 22 sample schools it was observed that relatively well designed and decorated class rooms were found in only 4 (18. 2%) schools. The class rooms in the rest 18 (81.8%) schools are those designed for primary school children. It was observed that chairs, desks and tables those fit the age of these children were available in only 2 (9.1 %) school. The other 19 (90.9%) schools utilize chairs, desks and tables those made for primary school children and those don’t fit to the age of “O-class” children.

4.3.4. Teaching-Learning Materials

Pre-primary schools; including “O-class” program has to be equipped with learning materials those help to ensure the effective implementation of the program. According to Iseberg and Jalongo (1993 cited in Haile,2010), the major categories of materials those per-primary institutions has to possess for the children of the stage include skill and concept materials like simple car games, books of varies types and puzzles; motor development materials like balls, pull toys, riding toys, etcetera; manipulative materials like building sets, markers, pencils, scissors, etcetera; constructional materials like blocks, building sets, and wood working materials; self-expressive materials like dolls, dress-up clothes, housekeeping toys, and musical instruments and natural materials like sticks, leaves, rocks, sand, mud, water etcetera.

As stated in the Guidelines for ECCE in Ethiopia (MoE, 2010), a variety of stimulating play and learning materials like puzzles, riddle and guessing games, stories and fairy tales those promote not only simple but also higher

thought processes should be available. To enhance creativity, there should be a variety of visuals rich in color, texture and shape on the walls.

Table 11: Percentage of Schools with Teaching-Learning Materials

Teaching Learning materials status	No of schools Observed	No of schools Full fill the criteria	Percentage
The existence of playing materials those prepared from locally available materials like balls, puzzles, riddle and guessing games, stories and fairy tales	22	19	86.4
Availability of natural materials like sticks, leaves, rocks, sand, mud, water etcetera.	22	22	100.0
The availability of modern learning materials like Skill and concept materials, Motor development materials, Manipulative materials, Self-expressive materials, Constructional materials	22	4	18.2

According to the data and information obtained and summarized in table 11, among 22 schools where observations have taken place it was found that 19 (86.4%) schools were in a position to fulfill teaching material those prepared from locally available materials and plays like balls, puzzles, riddle and guessing games, stories and fairy tales. Seeing children playing by locally made ball is common in most of schools

Regarding the availability of natural materials like sticks, leaves, rocks, sand, mud, and water they were available in almost all 22 (100%) schools under observation. It was observed that in most of the schools children of the stage have been playing with their peers using the naturally existing materials mention above.

Concerning the availability of modern learning materials like skill and concept materials, motor development materials, manipulative materials, self-

expressive materials and constructional materials there were available in only 4 (18.2%) schools among the 22 observed schools. It was understood by the researcher that these schools fulfill the modern playing and teaching materials by the help of international and locally NGOs. This shows that the role of government and local community to edged in this area is very low and needs improvement. The remaining 18 (81.8%) observed sample primary schools have no these diversified playing and teaching materials.

From the above analysis it is possible to conclude that in most of sample schools because of the scarcity of budget and less attention given for “O-class” education the fulfillment of teaching-learning materials was not addressed well and needs due attention by the respective concerned bodies.

4.4. Major Challenges in the Provision of “O-class” Program

The study done by Cosmas (2010) highlighted some challenges facing pre-primary education which included lack of instructional materials, lack of chairs and tables or desks, high enrolment in some schools, low enrolment in some schools, absence of classroom(s)/buildings for pre-school pupils, low quality pre-primary education, shortage and untrained pre-primary education teachers.

From the findings of this study the major challenges encountering the program identified as follows.

4.4.1. “O-class” program Curriculum

The development of curriculum, guidelines and standards for pre-school are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The Regional Education Bureau and respective Education Offices are responsible for the adaptation of the curriculum, guidelines and standards. Among the major challenges identified is the nonappearance of adapted curriculum and guideline in almost all schools taken as sample of the study. Accordingly among 33 sample schools principals and “O-class” teachers only 1 (3.0%) and 6 (18.2%)

respectively responded that curriculum and guideline are available in their schools. Due to the absence of curriculum and guideline designed for pre-primary education in general and adapted to “O-class” program in particular teachers are forced to deliver education by their own effort that differs from school to school and woreda to woreda. Even the document is not available at education offices except the existence of the National Policy framework and Strategic Operational Plan and Guidelines for ECCE at Bureau level.

4.4.2. “O-class” program Teachers

There is critically shortage, possible to say scarcity, of teaching staff with standard qualification for the stage in almost all sample schools. In most of the schools, only 3 (9.1%) school principals and 6 (81.2%) “O-class” teaches agreed that teaches of the level are qualified. The remaining figure indicate that personnel assigned to teach the children of the stage are not professionally qualified and they were grade 10 complete students even without having short term trainings that help them to upgrade their skills and knowledge, especially in the field of active learning of young children. This situation counters what has stated in the Guidelines for ECCE in Ethiopia (MoE, 2010) concerning the qualification of teaches of the stage. In the document it is stated that teachers of the stage should hold a 10 months pre-school teacher training course certificate from the Teacher Education Institute or have attended two months course to upgrade their skills and knowledge, especially in the field of active learning of young children. The recent standard qualification for pre-primary education teachers have to have a minimum of diploma. Even the teachers those have got chance to upgrade their qualification in summer program are not taking courses that in line with pre-primary education. Those already completed their training have assigned to teach grades (1-8) by leaving “O-class” they had been assigned for.

4.4.3. “O-class” program Learning Environment

There is no budget allocation experience in these sample schools to make the physical environment conducive for children of the stage. As data obtained from observation reveal only 3 (13.6%) schools have relatively suitable environmental conditions, Only 2 (9.1%) schools have separated compound and in the rest schools the places where “O-class” education delivery take place have not been fenced and not conducive for children to learn and play games.

Because of the scarcity of budget there almost no separate basic sanitation facilities like latrine and water in sample school. Only 4 (18.2%) schools have well designed and decorated class rooms In most of the schools classrooms were not designed to the standard that tend to make the education delivery process difficult for the children. Desks, chairs and other equipments designed for these children were available in only 2 (9.1 %) school. In most of the schools desks, chairs and other equipments are those designed for primary school children. As a result children of the stage have faced problem to seat, write and read on it properly. Only 4 schools (18.2%) schools have outdoor playing equipments like climbing frames and locally made swings and seesaws those helps to meet their psychological, emotional and physical needs. In most of schools these outdoor playing equipments are not in place.

4.4.4. Teaching and Learning Materials

The finding of the study shows that there was a critical shortage of teaching and learning materials in most of these sample schools. Specially, the modern learning materials like skill and concept materials, motor development materials, manipulative materials, self-expressive materials and constructional materials were available in only 4 (18.2%) schools. In most of the schools the shortage of teaching and learning facilities is found as one of the major causes for poor provision of education of the level. Due to the

unavailability of these materials children are unable to get direct and firsthand experiences. The findings are in line with Mbatha (2004) and Katz (1999) who observed that children in schools with critical shortage of teaching and learning resources require a lot of efforts from teachers to learn well than those in rich communities.

4.5. “O-class” Program Enrolment

As has been discussed in detail, pre-primary education in general includes enrolment of children in kindergartens, “O class” and child to child programs those normally involve children of ages 4 to 6. Specifically, “O-Class” is a one-year pre-primary program, delivered by primary schools, organized for children of only age 6 before they enter grade one.

Table 12: Oromia Region "O-Class" Enrolments Trend by Age

Year	Below 4 Years		4 Years		5 Years		6 Years		Above 6 Years	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
2014	1578	1538	38915	34525	69601	63367	82764	74466	6181	5685
2015	2372	1907	58834	53453	90119	80830	105120	92899	5737	4993
2016	3210	2799	130160	116473	159509	144740	161459	143349	6232	5598
2017	1976	1765	100620	88599	129526	115021	136976	121775	5035	4632
2018	3776	5597	89032	78489	112764	101482	121972	108171	9634	9306

Table 13: East Shoa Zone "O-Class" Enrolments Trend by Age

Year	Below 4 Years		4 Years		5 Years		6 Years		Above 6 Years	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
2014	146	134	3597	3391	5198	4743	6197	5769	352	416
2015	71	61	4884	4575	5761	5305	6765	6203	120	143
2016	26	38	7033	6544	7638	7257	7787	7237	485	386
2017	52	58	4335	3912	4904	4723	5214	4689	149	153
2018	104	160	3792	3465	4223	3999	4599	4108	91	82

Source: Oromia Education Bureau Education Statistics Annual Abstracts (2104-2018)

The government target is for 6 year old children to join “O-class” before starting school at age 7. What the data show in table 12 and 13, however, is that most of the students enrolled in “O-class” were below the target age of 6 years, in other words, aged 5 or younger. As the data reveal, the sum of children below 6 years old enrolled for “O class” in 2018 at regional level was 391,140. Whereas the number of children at age 6 enrolled for “O-class” in the same year was 230,143 that imply the number of children enrolled for “O-class” at age 6 were less than children enrolled with below 6 years old. The same problem has been happened at Zonal level. On the other hand there were children enrolled for “O-class” who are above 6 years old instead of enrolled in grade one.

Education researchers are often more concerned with over-age enrolment, but while these younger children are certainly helping boost the national enrolment rate, their attendance in “O-Class” raises from year to year. The challenges concerning this issue linked to answer questions like what is it like to be in an “O-class” with 3 year olds, 4 year olds, 5 year olds, 6 year olds and sometimes also 7 year olds running around in the same space? How do these multi-age classes work in practice? Is it an efficient way to provide education for such a variety of developmental needs? Are teachers able to cope with, and are curricula suited for, children at such different ages and development stages? In general treating children with different age group in the same class is difficult in terms of addressing their needs, child psychology, and other related issues.

Chapter Five

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main focus of this chapter is about summary of the main findings, conclusion and recommendations forwarded by the researcher in the areas of practices and challenges of “O-class” program.

5.1. Summary

It is undeniable that well established experiences of children before they enter primary school are very important in affecting their livelihood. Early years in life are widely accepted as the most important period during which children experience cognitive, language, perceptual, socio-emotional and motor development which they will need for future achievements and social functioning and foundational to the rest of their life. Children’s development, in turn, affects not only their personal well-being but also their capacity to contribute to the well-being of society in general.

As an approach to pre-primary education, special and detailed attentions have to be given by the respective education offices for “O-class” program so as to bring the expected advantages. Even though public primary schools have been implementing the program, its current status needs to be assessed.

The main purpose of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of “O class” program in public primary schools in terms of curriculum, teachers, learning aids and learning environment. The basic research questions like how the overall practices of the program have been, how the teachers status is to prepare children for future education, to what extent favorable learning environment and necessary learning aids were fulfilled and what major challenges encountering in the effective implementation of the program were formulated.

To address the above basic research questions data were collected from 3 Woredas those were selected through cluster sampling method. Out of 164 government primary schools located in rural areas of these three selected Woredas to which “O-class” programs were annexed, 33 schools have been selected using simple random sampling. By using availability sampling methods 33 “O-class” teachers, 33 school principals and 5 education experts; totally 71 participants have been selected to be participated in the study.

To analyze the collected data, mainly descriptive statistical analysis has been used. The quantitative data have been analyzed using count, frequency and percentage. Qualitative information obtained through open-ended questionnaires, interview guideline and observation checklist have been discussed and interpreted qualitatively through narration using the themes obtained from the interviews and observations.

The determinant factors those can be taken as pillar for the effective implementation of the program were found as they have not been addressed well. Accordingly,

- Data obtained from the participants concerning the naming used for the program revealed that the naming was found as it is not expressive for the education of the level in primary schools by most of the research participants. Most of the participants have agreed that among the proposed naming for the program School Readiness Class is their preference.
- The research question about whether the existing ECCE curriculum has been adapted for the effective implementation of the program in the locality has revealed the majority of the respondents responded that pre-primary education curriculum that designed for the program which serves teachers of the stage as a guide is not available in schools. Due to the absence of curriculum and guideline adapted for “O-class”

program, teachers are forced to deliver education for children by their own effort that differs from school to school.

- Conserving whether or not the teachers assigned to teach the children of the level were professionally qualified and well trained, most of the respondents responded that teachers of the level are not professionally qualified and well trained. Consequently it was found that most of the teachers assigned to teach the children of the stage were grade 10 complete students even without having short term trainings that help them to upgrade their skills and knowledge, especially in the field of active learning of young children.
- Data obtained using research question that formulated to investigate whether or not favorable learning environment and necessary learning aids have full filled for the implementation of the program revealed that the favorability of learning environment and the fulfillment of learning aids have not been addressed due to budget constrain in most of sample schools.

In general it was identified by the researcher that major challenges like absence of curriculum and guideline for the program, lack of trained and qualified teaches, unfavorable learning environment, lack of teaching and learning materials and below as well as above the target age of 6 years students enrolled in “O-Class” were encountering the program not to be implemented effectively.

5.2. Conclusions

Pre-school education including “O-class” has long-term and progressive effects in school success, including higher achievement test scores, lower rates of grade repetition and their future educational attainment. Children who enter school ‘ready to learn’ are more likely to succeed at school, stay in school and achieve learning. It is not only seen to prepare children to adjust to formal

schooling but also kick-starts for the process of inculcating the essential values of life and prepares them physically, emotionally, socially and mentally for the road ahead. In addition it has become a popular strategy to protect drop-out of children from formal education all over the world specifically from early grades. It is also associated with reducing misbehaving and crime in childhood and adulthood.

All the advantages of pre-primary education mentioned above for the children and the education system at large reveal the reason why the periods of the early years need to be handled with all special and detailed attention. Accordingly, the curriculum and guideline prepared for Kindergartens has to be adapted and disseminated to all schools so as to make teaching of the level similar in all schools and to help teachers to have the guide at their hands that guide them what and how to teach children of the level. Places in primary schools where “O-class” education delivery take place have to be fenced and made to be conducive for children to learn and play games. Classrooms have to be designed to the standard that fit to the age of the children and should be well decorated. Desks, chairs and other equipments schools use for “O-class” children should be designed and available by considering the age of the children.

Outdoor playing equipments like climbing frames and locally made swings and seesaws those helps children to meet their psychological, emotional and physical needs have to be fulfilled in the schools. Beside this, the critical shortage of qualified teachers as well as teaching and learning materials for education of the level should be solved so as to make conducive environment for the children to gain what they have to gain from the program. In order to benefit the children and education system at large, Early Childhood Care and Education in general and “O-class” program in particular is the scientific, economic and right thing to do.

5.3. Recommendations

1. The pre-primary education curriculum that have been developed by MoE which helps to provide uniform pre-primary education for all children of the stage in schools and that can be used to avoid ambiguity and difficulty in the process of “O-class” education delivery has not been adapted for “O-class” program and has not disseminated to schools. To solve this problem the Regional Education Bureau should adapt the existing pre-primary education curriculum with contextualized text books and teacher guides then disseminate to all schools so as to minimize and then avoid the ambiguity and difficulty in the process of “O-class” education delivery.
2. Teachers have been hired and assigned to teach the children of the stage are grade 10 complete students even without having short term trainings that help them to upgrade their skills and knowledge, especially in the field of active learning of young children. Their qualification has to be upgrade to diploma in summer program and should be trained for pre-primary education. In addition all teachers assigned to teach “O-classes” need to get professional development trainings and on job short term trainings and orientation from time to time.
3. The physical environment where “O-Class” education is delivered in schools needs to be safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experiences. To realize this budget should be allocated from different sources like government, donors, community participation and NGOs for the level so as to fence the ground and avail separate basic sanitation facilities like latrine and water, to decorate classrooms, to avail desks, chairs and other equipments those fit to the age of the children, to fulfill outdoor playing equipments like climbing frames and locally made swings and seesaws in the already separated and fenced compound. Varieties of stimulating play and learning materials also have to be fulfilled. Especially if woreda education offices can allocate budget for “O-class” children like

they allocate for primary and secondary schools and let other partners to participate, not only “O-class” program but also the overall education system specifically the recent education quality and efficiency can be improved.

4. The naming which has been used to call the program in schools was perceived as the common name “per-primary education” that comprises Kindergarten, Child-to-Chile and “O-class” even at national level. This dilemma of using the name has to be solved. In addition to this it was found that the name doesn’t express the education of the level that simply derived from “Zero class” and found to be changed. So it is recommended by the researcher that it is better if the naming of the program can be changed and called School Readiness Class (SRC) as responded by most of the participants in the study.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent!

This questionnaire is prepared to conduct a research on Practice and Challenges of “O-class” Program in Public Primary Schools. It will be submitted to the Department of Educational Planning and Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master’s of Art Degree in School Leadership. The main objective of this study is to assess the practice & challenges of “O class” program in public primary schools.

First of all I would like to thank and appreciate, in advance, for your kind cooperation to fill this questionnaire which will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The responses of his research questionnaire will be used only for academic purpose and remains confidential too. Thus, you are kindly requested to give your genuine response.

Please; consider the following points before you start filling the questionnaire.

- A. No need of writing your name in this questionnaire
- B. Before you are trying to answer the questions, please read carefully and understand them well.
- C. Write briefly your response for open-ended questions. You can use “Afan oromo”!
- D. Do not leave the questions unanswered.

Lastly; if you have any concern about this questionnaire, you can contact me through my personal phone: 0911960014

Sincerely!

Part I: General Information and Respondents' Background

1. Your organization

School

Woreda Education Office

Zonal Education Office

Regional Education Bureau

2. Your current title/position/career

Teacher

School Principal

CRC Supervisor

Education expert

If you are a teacher, of which one "O class"

Grades

3. Sex: Male

Female

4. Your Age: Below 20 years

21-25 years

26-30 years

31- 35 years

35- 40 years

above 40 years

5. Your Educational status:

Below diploma

Diploma

First degree

Master & above

6. Your total service

Below 5 years

6- 10 years

11- 15 years

16-20 years

above 20 years

Part II: Research Questions Related to the Status of "O class" Program

1. Naming, Curriculum and Guideline

The following statements describe the recommended issues and what have to be fulfilled for "O-class" program as one approach of pre-primary education delivery. Please indicate your level of agreement by making **tick** (√) on the appropriate box provided that most closely represents your opinion. You are requested to rate your opinion from the five scales given below. (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=moderate, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). Write your opinion briefly on the space provided for open-ended questions.

SN	Descriptions	Rating Scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.1	The naming used for the program called “O-class” is meaning full and acceptable					
1.2	Guideline that helps practitioners and teachers to implement the program effectively exists					
1.2	A guideline that helps practitioners and teachers to implement the program effectively is mandatory to exist					
1.3	The existing ECCE curriculum is adapted for “O-class” program					
1.4	Teaching children of the stage is based on the curriculum developed for the program					
1.5	Independent curriculum for “O-class” program that acknowledges the importance of play and allowing children to be active learners is needed					

1.6. Do you know why/how it is called “O-class”? ____; if your response is yes, explain why/how!

1.7. If the naming needs to be changed which one of the following do you prefer?

- a. Preparedness class (“Kutaa Qophii”) c. School Readiness class (Kutaa Qophaa’ummaa)
b. Before school class (“Kutaa tokko duree”) d. If any_____

1.8. Do you think that independent curriculum and guideline must exist for the program? _____, explain why!_____

2. Teachers/Caregivers

SN	Descriptions	Rating Scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
2.1	Teachers/Caregivers of the program have college level preparation with appropriate study period (diploma in pre-primary education/”O-class” program)					
2.2	Teachers/Caregivers of the program are with special kind of training with special emphasis on the entire program of early childhood education					
2.3	Teachers/Caregivers of the program possess knowledge of childcare, psychology and educational methods of teaching children					
2.4	Teachers/Caregivers assigned to teach “O-class” are among teaches trained for primary schools					
2.5	Teachers/Caregivers of the program acquire frequent on job-training and orientation about "O-Class" program					

2.6. Of what qualification the teachers/caregivers of “O-class” program are in your school? Why?

2.7. What is your suggestion in the areas of teachers/caregivers training and assignment for the program?

3. What are the major challenges those encounter the program?

- a.

- b.

- c.

- d.

- e.

4. What is your suggestion and opinion in solving these challenges?

Interview Checklist for Education Experts about “O-class” Program Status

ZoneEast Shoa

Woreda.....

School.....

Title/position/career: Teacher School Principal CRC Co-ordinator

Education expert

Sex M F

Education Level Diploma BA/BSc MA/MSc

1. What do you think about the naming/nomenclature of the program?

a) Do you know why/how it is called “O-class? Yes No If yes/no

b) Is it suitable and meaning full for you? Yes No If yes/no

c) Do you have other option to call? Yes No

2. What is your opinion about the current status of the program?

a. Curriculum and guideline

b. Professionally qualified caregivers/teachers

c. Learning environment

d. Learning materials

3. Do you think that due attention has been given by the concerned bodies, especially the government, for its effective implementation?

4. What is/are the major challenges that/those encounter the program in general?

Observation Guideline for “O-class” Program Learning Environment and Learning Aids Status

Zone.....East Shoa

Woreda.....

School.....

1. The physical environment/compound is safe and suitable for the provision of a rich and diverse range of experiences for children.

2. The environmental conditions; site, building and the overall physical setting is conducive for children of the level

3. The existence of separated, safe and secured play area with playing equipments like frames and locally made swings and seesaws

4. Whether the learning environment (classroom) condition is well-designed and decorated

5. The existence of playing materials those prepared from locally available materials.

6. The availability of modern learning materials

✓ Skill and concept materials like simple car games, books of varies types and puzzles

✓ Motor development materials like balls, pull toys, riding toys

✓ Manipulative materials like building sets, markers, pencils, scissors

✓ Self-expressive materials like dolls, dress-up clothes, housekeeping toys, and musical instruments

✓ Constructional materials like blocks, building sets and wood working materials
