

**ASSESSMENT OF THE PRACTICES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT:
THE CASE OF GERMAN CHURCH SCHOOL IN ADDIS ABABA**

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List of Acronyms

ACPF: African Child Policy Forum

CSA: Central Statistical Authority

ECCE: Early childhood Care and Education

ECE: Early Childhood Education

EFA: Education for All

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

MoE: Ministry of Education

MOLSA:Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

UNICEF United Nations International Children’s Education Fund.

WHO World Health Organization

Abstract

Early childhood experiences are very imperative in affecting children's holistic development and also their capacity to contribute to the wellbeing of the society. However, this possibility is not merely accessible for many children with visual impairments. The purpose of this study was to assess the practices of early childhood education for children with visual impairment regards to the instructional practices, accessibility of classroom and outside classroom physical environment and parent school communication. Moreover, the study was aimed to identify the good practices and challenges in supporting preschool children with visual impairment. In order to attain the purpose, interview, FGD and field observations were employed. Results indicated, the school is offering snack, guidance and counseling service, medical and financial support. The results for analysis provided the specific information of instructional contents, in some way given attention to the socio emotional, mathematical and language development of children. However, instruction is failed to notice the value of storytelling, singing, creative movement, and play that help children to promote their development. The study finds out less attention is given for family role at home in supporting children with visual impairment. Also, lack of documentation is noticed as a challenge. Classroom is accessible for children with visual impairment; Pathways, water taps and the toilet are also favorable and accessible however, there are no outdoor playing materials. In order to improve the beginner class services for children with visual impairment, research forwards the school to use age appropriate instruction, build up documentation of academic records and advancement in parent school communication. Also the researcher forwards to government officials working together to make preschools accessible for children with visual impairment.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

According to the World Health Organization (2010) report, the number of blind or visually impaired people in the world was 180 million. This number will reach 360 million by 2020 unless joint action is adopted to prevent it. Thus ninety percent of the world's blind people live in developing countries: nine million in India, seven million in Africa and six million, in China (WHO, 2010).

In Ethiopia, there are many are found with various kinds of disabilities. As per to the report of the Housing and Population Census of the Ethiopian Government Central Statistics Authority CSA (2007), the number of persons with disabilities accounts 805,535 and constitutes 1.09% of the total population. The numbers of blind people are 94,140 and seeing difficulties 154,819. From this, the number of blind children age 0 – 14 accounts 8,845 (CSA 2007 cited in MoLSA, 2010).

Experiences of children in their early years, before they enter primary school, are very important in affecting their long-term development. 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. But, in Ethiopia, young children start life with burdens and are least likely to gain access to quality health care, proper nutrition, education, and protection. These disadvantages are enlarged by marginalization and sometimes discrimination throughout early childhood, particularly affecting children with disabilities, children from poor families (UNICEF, 2007).

As study conducted by Kelley & Gale (1998) indicated, it is vital to provide earliest possible for children with visual impairments like as other typical children to be placed in early childhood education.

As much as 90% of what we know is learned through a vision. Children visual impairments will have difficulty accessing information, leading to typical knowledge and skill development. Unless competent efforts are made to compensate for the reduced access to the environment, children with visual impairments may have limited development of concepts and the world around them, Kelley & Gale (1998, P.42).

In describing the developmental needs, ECCE in Ethiopia covers prenatal to 3+ years and 4 till 6+ years. The milestone for the second phase of the ECE program is when the child starts going to early childhood education establishments and this period covers from four to six years (Ministry of Education, 2010). In line with this, the city government of Addis Ababa Education Bureau education statistics annual abstract (2013/2014) stated that the number of ECCE is 1085 (government 196, public 2 and private & others 887). Under this, the total number of children attending preschools are from 4-6 was 142, 534 in both sex. But, there are no significant data presented in giving educational services for children with visual impairments and other disabilities in early childhood education.

As the report of ESDP IV, schools are called into question by addressing their students' special educational needs. Lack of trained teachers, shortage of resourced and instructional materials is major problems. The prior two Education Sector Development Programs did not pay attention to the education of children with disabilities. This changed with ESDP III which gave educational needs in order to achieve the EFA goals, which are intended to ensure access and

quality education for students with special educational needs (Ministry of Education, 2010).

However, Still in ESDP IV attention is given to primary, secondary school and higher education enrolment but remained the participation of children with special needs at the preschool level.

In order to provide education for children with visual impairments, government and other stakeholders have responsibilities to provide educational service. In view of that, to fill the gaps in addressing the educational needs of children with visual impairments, nongovernmental institutions are making efforts to address the educational needs of children with visual impairments. Aspire to create education accessto children with visual impairments; the German Church School established an integrative educational program since 1989, in which blind and seeing children are taught jointly. The school provides education (grades 1-8) to children of destitute families in the surrounding area of the church grounds free of charge. The school is administered by the German speaking congregation and staffs of the school are Ethiopians. Financing of the work of the school is covered through personal sponsorships (donations for support of specific children) and private foster ships (donations for specific projects) as well as various undesignated donations and subsidies from relief aid organizations.

Due considering that the German Church School's ample experiences in teaching children with visual impairments as well as the school is accepting preschool children with visual impairments, the present study conducted at German Church School in Addis Ababa aimed to assess the practices of early childhood education for children with visual impairment.

1.2 Statement of the problem

A report by UNICEF (2007) indicates in Africa Children with disabilities and their families constantly face social, political and economic barriers that adversely affect their development and prevent them from being included in society and enjoying their basic right to education to the fullest. As a consequence, the strengths and abilities of children with disabilities

are unnoticed, their potential is underestimated, and their needs are given low priority in allocating resources.

Too many young children are growing up without health care, stimulation and interaction as well as adequate ECE services needed to promote healthy growth and development. Many poor children are either denied the opportunity to go to school at all or enter unready to learn. They are at a disadvantage when they enter the labor force, earning little, and as parents they pass their poverty on to their children. This is more worth in children with visual impairments and other kinds of disabilities (ACPF, 2011b).

In Early childhood education program, the child could be away from the mother and be exposed to new experiences, such as meeting children, learning to sit in the classroom and to play in the play ground with others. The program aims to ensure that children grow up healthy, well nourished and protected from harm, with a sense of self-worth and identity, enthusiasm and opportunities for learning. Early childhood education makes sure children have opportunities to explore, discover, communicate effectively, get on with others, and play an active role in their environment. However, In Ethiopia, only 4 percent of children attended this type of education (Tirussew, 2009)

In Ethiopia majority of preschools have diversified instructions isolated from one another and lack of cooperation is observed among them. Generally, most programs do not fulfill the basic quality indicators for early childhood education such as, developmentally appropriateness, culturally responsiveness in terms of relevant materials, activities, and trained personnel. Furthermore lack of space for playground as well as inadequate play ground facilities are not noticed in most preschools. In addition, they don't exercise effective involvement of families in

their program. Besides, due focus is being given only to children who are not victims of disability in educational program in our country (MoE, 2010).

In Early childhood education program, a child with visual impairment is expected to develop social interaction the same as other typical child, cognitive skills, emotional stability and fine motor and gross motor activities. To achieve this, ECE instructional practices and the physical environment should be designed to address the holistic development of a child with visual impairment. Otherwise, the child can't be able to develop the skills the same as other typical children. But, unfortunately, the number of children with visual impairments at the preschool level is not clearly known. This situation can be taken as the major problems and enlightening that the existed preschools or early childhood education programs practically not accessible for children with visual impairments.

1.3 Objectives of the research

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the research was to study the current practice of early childhood education for children with visual impairment at German Church School.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objective of the study is to:

1. Assess the current instructional practices of the early childhood education for preschool children with visual impairment.
2. Explore the accessibility of classroom and outside of the classroom physical environment.
3. Assess the practice concerning parent school communication.
4. Identify good practices and challenges in supporting preschool children with visual impairment.

1.4 Scope of the study

This study is delimited to an assessment of the practices of early childhood education for children with visual impairment in the case of German Church School in Addis Ababa from the standpoint of instructional practices, accessibility of classroom and outside of the classroom physical environment and parental school communication. Furthermore, gives emphasis on identifying good practices and challenges in supporting children with visual impairment. The study was also spatially delimited at German Church School located in Addis Ababa Yeka Subcity commonly known around “Sidistkillo”.

1.5 Description of the study Area

The German Church School is one of the integrated education which is a special program designed for visually impaired students established in 1989. Since the program started, many children with visual impairment benefit from the program. Under the sponsorships program 1159 children get support at different educational levels. Currently the school compound accommodates and providing educational service for 535 regular students and children with visual impairments accounts 44. The remaining children of the sponsorship program are attending their education in other government and private schools. Moreover the school support is continued until the student complete college or higher education. Recently as a result of encountered problems in putting children in grade one, a separate class known by the school beginner class was opened pursuant to the assumptions to give basic self help and academic skills to make the children ready for grade one.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

Resources related to relevant local studies and available data concerning the status of preschool children with visual impairment at preschool level was a major limitation encountered in conducting this study.

1.7 Significance of the study

Recognizing the status of children with visual impairment in getting access of early childhood education, the study will serve as a source for concerned bodies to find possible solutions for those practical problems going to be pointed out in the research and help as baseline information for conducting further research studies in this area.

The researcher of this study believes that the study may provide valuable suggestions and recommendations for German Church School administrators and teachers for further planning to fill the gaps concerning to early childhood education programs to address the needs of children with visual impairment. In general, the research will contribute a lot in identifying and pointing out the practical problems and recommending possible solutions.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Blind: A child who is completely lost vision or/and a child hasn't lost his/her sight completely but has lost enough vision means that the child sees at 20 feet what is normally seen at 200 feet. This child uses brail to read and write.

Early childhood education: A class organized for children with visual impairments. It is a place for the acquisition of language and basic academic skills like (pre-reading, pre-writing, counting and arithmetic) concept of the environment and socio emotional competency in preparation for the child formal schooling. Also be an area where children learn basic life skills.

Practice: The school activities in relation to instructional practices, accessibility of the classroom and outside of the classroom physical environment and the activities in parental school communication.

Visual Impairment: Either a child who is blind or a child with partial vision loss and use brail to read and write.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to present the brief review of the practices of early childhood education for children with visual impairment. Specifically on the concept and definition of children with visual impairments, early childhood education, instructional practices, accessibility of classroom and outside of the classroom physical environment and parent school communication.

2.1 Visual Impairment

Visual impairment can be described as the loss of some aspect of vision that reduces a child's ability to see. Visual impairments range in severity from mild vision loss to the total absence of light perception (Newfoundland & Labrador, 2007).

The preschool child with visual impairment is above all a child with unique abilities and needs. Second, he or she is a child who is under a visual impairment. As with all young children, the preschool period is a period of immense learning and preparation for future experiences. These children may require direct teaching of skills and guidance through experiences which the child with normal vision encounters incidentally (Koenig & Holbrook, 2000).

The development of the child with visual impairment may progress at the same rate as his or her sighted peers, or may differ widely, depending on a variety of factors. These factors include: Degree of visual loss, age of diagnosis, presence or absence of additional disabilities, amount of early intervention and network of support available to the child and family (Koenig & Holbrook, 2000).

2.1.1 A child who is blind

A child with a visual acuity of 20/200 or less with corrective lenses is considered to be blind. Children who are unable to learn through visual channels and require teaching through sensory and tactile channels are considered blind from an educational perspective. Many people assume that children who are “blind” have no vision at all and live in a world of darkness. This is not always true. A child who is blind may be able to perceive light or may not see anything at all. The accommodations or adaptations required for a child who is blind are extensive. Children who are blind require instruction in Braille, functional or independent living skills, and orientation and mobility (Koenig & Holbrook, 2000).

2.1.2 A child with low vision

The majority of children who are legally blind have useful vision. However, they may have to be taught to use this vision efficiently. These children may read regular or large print or use Braille and may learn through visual channels in addition to tactile methods. They may travel with or without a cane. Children with low vision may require supports such as special seating, large print materials, taped materials, and lighting considerations, provision of low vision aids, orientation and mobility and other supports or accommodations/adaptations based on the nature and severity of the visual impairment (Kelley& Gale, 1998)

2.2 Early Childhood Development

Early childhood is a very critical period when rapid transformations occur in children’s physical, mental, cognitive, and socio emotional facilities. Recent advances in neurobiology and other brain research fields have highlighted the crucial role of the early years in the formation of the human brain Early childhood is also a very sensitive period and the quality of a child’s experiences in the early years has a major impact on his or her future life chances. Research in brain development noted that the first weeks and months of life show that negative experiences

in the early years, have long-lasting effects on brain development and major social and economic impacts on society (Mustard, 2002).

Early environment and experiences play a pivotal role in shaping the developmental outcomes for individual children. We understand that there are sensitive periods throughout the early years when the brain is more strongly influenced by environmental factors with brain mechanisms shaped and adapted according to their usage. The theorists argued that 3 and 4-year-old children are generally most sensitive to establishing learning patterns that influence their social skills and cognitive development. It therefore makes sense for children of this age to spend time in an environment that provides them with positive opportunities for social learning and cognitive exploration (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

2.3 Early childhood education

Research suggests that significant and critical brain development and development of intelligence occurs before the age of seven, particularly during the first three years of life. This process is influenced by a child's nutritional and health status and also by the kind of interaction a child develops with people and objects in the environment. Early Childhood development programs are concerned with: Interactions within the family, promoting the understanding that learning begins at birth; the home is the most important influence on the child, and parents and other family members are the child's first and most important caregivers and teachers (Mustard, 2010). Apart from this, the great importance of ECE explained as follows.

Early childhood education (ECE) refers to the education of children of preschool age between one to about eight years old. This education is based on interactive play activities and includes the physical and psychological care of the child as well. This concept is formed around the proven idea that children that participate

in early childhood education tend to learn at accelerated rates, are more likely to continue their education through primary, secondary and college level schooling, and tend to experience greater success and higher earnings during their careers (“UNICEF, 2007 P. 24).

Early childhood education has enormous individual, social and economic benefits. For example, early childhood programmes complement the roles of parents and other caregivers in raising children during the early years. The early childhood years set the foundation for life, ensuring that children have positive experiences and that their needs for health, stimulation and support are met, and that they learn to interact with their surroundings. Furthermore, early childhood education programs result in easier transition to primary school, better completion rates, reduced poverty and social equality (UNESCO, 2007).

Evidence from impact studies and longitudinal studies carried out both in developed and developing countries show the positive impact of ECCE on children outcomes as well as broader benefits for the family and society. Research also shows that investing in early childhood is the most powerful investment that a country can make with returns over the life course much greater than the amount of the original investment (UNESCO, 2007).

There is strong research evidence to support an increase in children’s cognitive development, language development and pre-academic skills such as pre-numeracy and pre-literacy when they have attended a high quality early childhood centre create warmer relationships with their teachers, and more advanced social skills than children who do not receive such attention. In contrast, children who do not benefit from a stimulating childcare environment have been found to be delayed in language and reading skills, and display more aggression toward other children and adults (Gillard &McKew, 2008).

High quality ECE program has bring great outcomes for the development of child as well as the society. Evidence from impact studies and longitudinal studies carried out both in developed and developing countries show the positive impact of ECE on children outcomes as well as broader benefits for the family and society. And also this research shows that investing in early childhood is the most powerful investment that a country can make with returns over the life course much greater than the amount of the original investment (Heyden& Snyder, 2006).

A very important emphasis in research findings is on *quality* as a poor quality centre does not offer the same capacity to enhance a child's development (Sylva, Melhuish, et al ., 2008). Schipper et al. (2006) found that an important aspect of quality was the child to caregiver ratio. They compared the same caregivers in a 5: 1 and 3: 1 ratio and found that a 3:1 ratio resulted in significantly higher quality child-caregiver interactions and an increase in child well-being and cooperation. Other important aspects of quality included the total number of children attending the centre and the education and training of the caregiver (Heyden& Snyder, 2006).

The benefits for children from disadvantaged households are potentially even more pronounced and it known that these children are at greater risk of experiencing poorer health, cognitive development, school achievement and socio-behavioral outcomes than children who are not disadvantaged. The evidence in favor of investment in the early years, particularly for disadvantaged children, is strong. Quality early childhood programs have been shown to play a significant role in improving developmental outcomes for disadvantaged children and closing the achievement gap between children from low and middle-class families (Sylva, Melhuish, et al ., 2004).

Private institutions account for about two thirds of pre-school enrolment in the majority of sub-Saharan African countries. Many private early learning centers are located in urban areas

and require the payment of fees, so access is limited to more advantaged groups. Children from poor households and those living in rural areas have limited access to ECCE services (ACPF, 2011a).

2.3.1 Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia

There is a long history of early childhood education in Ethiopia, with churches and mosques playing a prominent role before different modern types emerged in the country (Okirin, Workneh & et al., 2012). These include early childhood centers sponsored by the government, communities NGO faith-based organization and the private sector. Recently, growing interest in establishing community-sponsored early childhood centers, led to an increase in the number of preschools all over the country. The private sector has more been investing in early childhood education in the urban centers particularly in Addis Ababa (MoE, 2010). In recognizing the extent of Early Childhood Education, the Government of Ethiopia has formulated a national Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). This is in line with international practice based on new research in developmental psychology and the need to ensure smooth transitions. In describing the developmental needs ECCE in Ethiopia covers prenatal to 3+ years and 4 till 6+ years. The milestone for the second phase of ECCE program is when the child starts going to early childhood educational establishments. In, Ethiopia, this period covers from four to six years (MoE, 2010).

2.3.2 Educational Service Delivery Models for Children with Visual Impairment

Each student who is blind or visually impaired has their own unique learning needs. The type of service should reflect a student's need for specialized instruction at a specific time in his education. Some students may require a residential or special school specifically designed for students who are blind. The majority of students with visual impairments can be best served

within their local system. Depending on the students needs, they may need a consultation model, an itinerant model or to receive intensive services in a resource room at a magnet school for students with visual impairments. In order to help students reach their fullest potential, schools should provide a full array of options to assure appropriate placement for each student (Carmen, 2014).

2.3.2.1 The Itinerant Model

Students in the general education program or those assigned to a self contained classroom for students with visual impairments may require itinerant direct services from a teacher of children with visual impairments. The time that the itinerant teacher spends with the students should be based only on the time require to meet the goal identified in the IEP and may vary from daily instruction to biweekly or weekly instruction (Carmen, 2014).

Teaching techniques to enhance vision should not be taught in isolation. It is important to look what the needs and activities of the school and in their everyday life that are affected by their visual performance, and teach those tasks. The Itinerant teacher will make suggestions for appropriate environmental and material adaptations (Carmen, 2014 P. 35).

2.3.2.2 The Resource Room Model

The resource room model is designed for students who require daily support from a Teacher of students with visual impairments. In this model, students attend a school that has been designed as a “magnet” school for students of their similarity aged with visual impairments who need daily contact with a teacher of students with visual impairments. The teacher is based at the magnet school in order to be accessible to the students and their teachers throughout the school day (Carmen, 2014).

Students are assigned to a general or special education classroom for most of the school day. Students attending these magnet resource classrooms have intensive instructional needs related

to their visual impairments. The amount of time spent in the classroom will vary among students, based on their unique needs. They will typically spend part of each day receiving instruction in the areas of the core curriculum and support that facilitates their academic progress. Although, the teacher of students with visual impairments may spend time ensuring that the students understand concepts introduced in academic courses. Some students will receive instruction in ways to access academic subjects, such as reading or basic mathematics, in this room to build a strong foundation upon which future learning can occur (Carmen, 2014).

2.3.2.3 The Consultation Model

Children who receive consultation require minimal or no direct service from a teacher of students with visual impairment. In the consultative model, the service is provided to the adults that work with the student on behalf of the student with visual impairment. In this model, the teacher provides intermittent observations of the student within their educational environment to determine if they are receiving the most appropriate adaptations to their materials, environment and instruction and to collaborate with teachers and therapists (Carmen, 2014)..

2.3.3 Keyelements ofInstructional practices in ECE for children with visual impairment

Classrooms offer many opportunities for children to manipulate a wide variety of materials; to play alone and with others in sensory, constructive, and symbolic activities; to ask questions and develop concepts about themselves and the world; to be physically active; and to express themselves in words, art, and music. A stimulating early childhood environment is designed so that student can succeed in it. This may mean adaptations in terms of the physical environment, expectations of level of participation and amount of teacher support, size and nature of groupings during the day, schedule, and the presentation of the activities and materials used. The chosen curriculum is responsive to the child's current level of skill and interests.

Effective curriculum calls on an integration of all areas of development: physical, social-emotional, language, and cognitive skills (Roopnarine, Jaipaul L., et al., 2005).

2.3.3.1 Physical Development and Health

Physical development is nurtured through movement. Teachers should recognize that young children learn through movement. They learn about spatial relationships, as well as internalizing the essence of whatever they touch and move.

Physical development impacts how children navigate the physical environment. Significant amount of time spent outdoors encourage large muscle movement and development, while the many artistic projects encourage fine motor skills (Roopnarine, Jaipaul L., et al., 2005). Therefore, the preschool environment should be organized to support both indoor and outdoor activities. Teachers should provide a wide range of concrete, developmentally appropriate, indoor and outdoor experiences each day to assist in the development of each child, including planned and spontaneous interactions promoting healthy habits that enhance lifelong well-being.

In this regard the following skills are major elements for children physical and health development (MoE, 2008).

Gross-motor skills: Children demonstrate strength, flexibility, balance, and timing in using their large muscles.

Fine-motor skills: Children demonstrate alertness and hand-eye coordination in using their small muscles.

Body awareness: Children know about their bodies and how to navigate them in space.

Personal care:Children develop self-help and personal hygiene skills.

Protection: Children begin to develop an awareness of potential hazards in their environment.

2.3.3.2 Social and Emotional Development

Young children's social and emotional growth and learning occurs as a result of their interactions with others. Relationships with adults and children in the preschool environment exert a powerful positive influence on children's social/emotional development. Creating a warm and nurturing environment in early childhood education not only helps children form trusting relationships with others but also promotes learning in all areas(New Jersey State Department of Education, 2013).

Emotional development is supported in the close personal relationship that each child develops with the teacher and through friendships that the child builds with peers. The child learns to gain greater control of emotions with development as it occurs in an environment that is safe, secure, and free of stress. The child plays out situations and role plays various emotions, internalizing appropriate actions to accompany feelings (Roopnarine, Jaipaul L., et al., 2005).

Preschool teachers support young students' developing self-concepts and self-esteem by talking with them about their actions and accomplishments and by always showing respect for their feelings and cultures. Surrounded by a positive and supportive classroom climate, children are likely to become engaged and motivated learners. Social development is well stimulated and practiced through imaginative play. Conflicts arise and children must work

through them and find a solution. The give and take of social discourse is learned also during snack time, as the children converse with one another (Roopnarine, Jaipaul L., et al., 2005).

Within this environment, activities and interactions are planned in social and emotional development listed below (MoE, 2008).

Self-identity: Children have a positive self-identity.

Sense of competence: Children feel they are competent.

Emotions: Children recognize, label, and regulate their feelings.

Empathy: Children demonstrate empathy toward others.

Community: Children participate in the community of the classroom.

Building relationships: Children build relationships with other children and adults.

Cooperative play: Children engage in cooperative play.

Moral development: Children develop an internal sense of right and wrong.

Conflict resolution: Children resolve social conflicts.

2.3.3.3 Language and Literacy

The connection between language and literacy is powerful. The curriculum focuses on this connection by providing meaningful language and literacy experiences for children during every part of the daily routines.

The acquisition of language and literacy skills is social. It happens because young children want to interact and communicate with others. Literacy learning occurs during meaningful interactions, experiences, and activities. Children differ in how and how fast they learn from each other. Some language and literacy learning happens naturally during play and everyday experiences, and some depends on explicit instruction from observant and sensitive adults (New Jersey State Department of Education, 2013). Classroom literacy experiences should allow for and value these differences.

Speaking, listening, reading, and writing develop concurrently rather than sequentially (MoE, 2008).

Speaking: Children express themselves using language.

Alphabetic knowledge: Children identify letter names and their sounds.

Reading: Children read for pleasure and information.

Concepts about print: Children demonstrate knowledge about environmental print.

Book knowledge: Children demonstrate knowledge.

Writing: Children write for many different purposes.

2.3.3.4 Mathematics

As young children explore their environment, they are beginning to notice relationships that are the foundations for mathematics. They can sort and match things that are the same or different; they can also arrange things in simple patterns, based on their characteristics; they are beginning to understand the meaning of words and phrases like

"more," "less," "a lot," and "the same as."(New Jersey State Department of Education, 2013).

A preschool classroom's physical and teaching environments should capitalize on children's natural, spontaneous interactions with math in the world around them by featuring a wide variety of ongoing mathematical opportunities. They are starting to use measurement to describe, compare, and order things, using either unconventional tools like pieces of string, sticks, and their footsteps or conventional tools like rulers and measuring cups(New Jersey State Department of Education, 2013).

They are also starting to recognize and describe the positions of people and objects and how they move through space in relation to other people and objects. They use their developing spatial awareness as they put together puzzles and build with blocks (MoE, 2008).

Areas should be focused in the instructional practices of mathematical skills are the followings(MoE, 2008).

Number words and symbols: Children recognize and use number words and symbols.

Counting: Children count things.

Part-whole relationships: Children combine and separate quantities of objects.

Shapes: Children identify, name, and describe shapes.

Spatial awareness: Children recognize spatial relationships among people and objects.

Measuring: Children measure to describe, compare, and order things.

Unit: Children understand and use the concept of unit.

Patterns: Children identify, describe, copy, complete, and create patterns.

Data analysis: Children use information about quantity to draw conclusions, make decisions, and solve problems.

2.3.3.5 Environment and Science

Young children first construct scientific knowledge by using their senses to interact with their environment and make sense of the world around them. Their science understanding is facilitated and extended by adults whose own sense of wonder is a match for their curiosity. Children are more inclined to observe, question, and reflect about their investigations when encouraged by teachers who are also invested in the process. Thus, throughout the preschool years, children develop and refine their scientific abilities through observing, inquiring, and experimenting during rich and inviting opportunities for open-ended exploration and focused inquiry(Grace& Bowes, 2008).

Teachers actively encourage sustained exploration of a particular topic over as long as four to five weeks of focused inquiry. Teachers understand that purposefully planned experiences within children’s immediate environment and daily surroundings provide the best context for science learning(MoE, 2008).

Observing: Children observe the materials and processes in their environment.

Geography: Children recognize and interpret features and locations in their environment.

Ecology: Children understand the importance of taking care of their environment.

Appreciating the arts: Children appreciate the creative arts.

Movement: Children express and represent what they observe, think, imagine, and feel

2.3.4 ECE Practical considerations in teaching children with visual impairment

Children who are blind or visually impaired may not have a clear picture of their world. This unclear view of the world means they may need assistance in all areas of their development: cognitive, linguistic, social, fine motor and gross motor. They may need to learn new ideas or concepts through direct teaching. They may also need to supplement what they learn through vision by exploring their other senses as well. They will have to learn that a world exists beyond themselves and their own needs (Newfoundland & Labrador, 2007).

Additionally, they will have to be taught and given the opportunity to come in contact with this world by learning to coordinate their movements through a variety of environments. Just giving young children with visual impairments experiences is not enough. New experiences must be related to what the child already knows and explained through a variety of techniques in order for the child to transfer information from one area to another (Kelley & Gale, 1998).

Including the family in the team, building the program around the child's and family's needs and valuing the input of the parent results in better, more effective programs for the child. At the same time, the visual impairment of the child should not be the only factor that defines the child. Parents, caregivers and teachers need to consider the total child, and that all those elements of childhood still exist. For example, discipline is still important, household tasks are necessary, play is vital and social visits with peers with and without visual impairments are important. Mistakes are part of all children's learning. Those working with a child who is blind or visually

impaired need encouragement to look at the child as a child, not as a visual diagnosis (Newfoundland & Labrador, 2007).

The goals for preschool children should follow, as closely as possible, those of children without visual impairments or blindness. However, children with visual impairments do not necessarily learn in either the same way or at the same rate as their age peers. Therefore, the program put in place for the preschool child should be child-specific with considerations for the visual impairment and the cognitive and physical needs of the child (Newfoundland & Labrador, 2007).

The following are specific areas which must be considered when programming for the preschool child with a visual impairment:

2.3.4.1 Daily Living Skills

Children who are blind or visually impaired should be just as responsible for their self care needs as their sighted peers. These self help skills are important for independence and self-esteem. Direct teaching will likely be necessary for these skills and compensatory techniques will be utilized by the child. A child with a visual impairment may miss out important details about daily activities, like how to brush one's teeth, or iron the clothes. These are learned incidentally by children with unimpaired vision (Newfoundland & Labrador, 2007).

2.3.4.2 Orientation and Mobility

Preschool children with visual impairments need a wide range of experiences and exploratory activities. Because these children may see and move comfortably within a familiar environment, some direct teaching may not be necessary. However, these children may not learn as visually as they appear to learn. Their understanding of basic concepts should be evaluated to indicate needs for direct teaching. Body parts, body planes, laterality, directionality and gross

and fine motor movements should be evaluated. It is important to ensure each child moves within the community as much as possible while explaining and allowing exploration of what is experienced(Sacks&Wolffe, 2006) .

For the preschool child who is blind, direct teaching is more intense and constant than that of a child with low vision. The child who is blind needs to have a safe environment which he or she can explore both inside and outside the home. Exploration in a wide variety of settings is necessary. Additionally, this child needs some control over his or her environment either by setting his or her own boundaries, or having established personal spaces. Using toys for boundary lines is one method by which the child would establish his or her own space limitations (Sacks&Wolffe, 2006).

2.3.4.3 Socialization skills

The acquisition and maintenance of socially appropriate behavior is mediated vision for individuals with sight. Much of what is learned socially is acquired through imitation and modeling. Children who are blind or visually impaired may not possess appropriate socialization skills for dealing with others, and they may not understand the complexities associated with expressing themselves in various environments because they have limited access to these very visual behaviors. Sighted children learn these interaction skills by watching and imitating those around them. Hence, it is important that these skills and behaviors are deliberately taught through structured experiences. Support in this area should come from all the significant people in the child's life – the parents, teachers, caregivers, friends, etc (Sacks&Wolffe, 2006).

First of all, the school environment must be one that promotes social integration, and the acceptance of differences among the students. Children with visual impairment will require

direct teaching of social skills so that they can learn acceptable ways of interacting with people and materials (e.g., not standing too close to people, not grabbing toys, saying “please”).

Children with visual impairments need problem solving skills and self advocacy skills. Having such skills will build their self-confidence and enhance their social interaction with their peers as well as adults (Sacks&Wolffe, 2006) .

Social development is stimulated and practiced through imaginative play. Conflicts arise and children must work through them and find a solution. The give and take of social discourse is learned also during snack time, as the children converse with one another (Roopnarine, Jaipaul L., et al., 2005).

Socio emotional development is supported in the close personal relationship that each child develops with the teacher and through friendships that the child builds with peers. The child learns to gain greater control of emotions with development as it occurs in an environment that is safe, secure, and free of stress. The child plays out situations and role plays various emotions, internalizing appropriate actions to accompany feelings (Roopnarine, Jaipaul L., et al., 2005).

2.3.4.4 Concept Development

Since many of our concepts are developed through vision, children who are blind or visually impaired need to be taught through non-visual means and concrete experiences. A concept may be defined as a mental representation, image or idea of what something should be. It is formed by classifying or grouping objects or events with similar properties. A concept is given a name or a label. Whenever possible, real objects should be used with children who are blind or visually impaired. Experiences may need to be repeated many times and concepts should be taught in a variety of situations and in contexts that are meaningful to the child. Concept

development is continuous. Many children who are blind or visually impaired use words without understanding their meaning. Examples of concepts which would need to be emphasized with the child are position, laterality, size, sequence, body image, quantity and emotions.

2.3.4.5 Sensory-Motor Skills

Vision is a motivating factor in sighted babies learning and practicing basic motor skills. Children who are blind or visually impaired will need direct teaching in this area in order to master the skills required for interacting with the environment. Some examples of gross motor skills would be posture, head control, limb control, and sitting, crawling, walking and balancing. Some examples of fine motor skills would be grasping and holding objects, exploring objects tactually or differentiating between different textures (Sacks & Wolfe, 2006).

2.3.4.6 Communication Skills:

A common myth is that children who are blind or visually impaired hear well than their sighted peers. There is no basis in fact for this notion, and it must be acknowledged that listening skills for all children are acquired through experience. Appropriate listening skills depend on the child's ease in using language. This ease depends on concept development and requires that the child understands the sounds heard. Therefore, specific attention must be paid to direct teaching of listening skills to children who are blind or visually impaired. If a child who is blind or visually impaired requires alternate format materials such as large print or Braille, it is essential to introduce these materials as early as possible so the child has a great deal of exposure to them. Exposure is important to language development (Sacks & Wolfe, 2006).

2.3.4.7 Technology and Special Equipment

Children who are blind or visually impaired will learn early that technology is important to their lives. They should be exposed to computer technology as soon as possible and should

begin to use tape recorders as a prelude to accessing books on audiotape. This learning can be combined with listening skills as well. Another necessary consideration is use of low vision aids (magnifiers or telescopes) and teaching the child how to use them properly. This, too, should begin as early as possible (Sacks&Wolffe, 2006).

2.4 Accessibility of Classroom and outside of the classroom physical environment

2.4.1 Classroom Physical Environment

It is widely recognized in the special needs education field that if a setting is developmentally appropriate for a typical child it will also be appropriate for a child with a disability, and therefore accommodating the physical environment will need to be made will be to the manner in which the child can fully participate (Chai, Zhang, et al., 2006).

Classrooms offer many opportunities for children to manipulate a wide variety of materials; to play alone and with others in sensory, constructive, and symbolic activities; to ask questions and develop concepts about themselves and the world; to be physically active; and to express themselves in words, art, and music Preparation of the play environment is a powerful tool for supporting and enhancing children's play and development (UNESCO, 2007).

Traversing an environmental structure such as a loft, with close supervision, may offer a child with a disability such as a visual impairment, a confidence building experience that may aid in the development of mobility in the classroom and community control. Thoughtful arrangements of space and materials can invite children's preparation in play and contribute to their efforts to organize and utilize materials, engage peers, and persist in play (UNESCO, 2007).

Children with visual impairments are highly dependent on auditory cues. Play activities in which children must attend to detail, such as art, reading, puzzles, and manipulative, should be located in well-lighted areas preferably with good natural lighting. Lighting conditions are

particularly important for children with low vision and for children with hearing impairments (Bruce, 2011).

Path-ways should be free of obstructions such as scattered toys or misplaced equipment that children with poor vision might trip over that might impede the movement of children with physical disabilities from one area to another. Paths should be wide enough to accommodate assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, and crutches. Children should never be denied access to a play area due to a physical or visual impairment (Bruce, 2011).

2.4.2 Outside of the classroom physical Environment

Arranging the outside of the classroom physical environment are necessary to enable children with visual impairments to participate fully in play. Environment which allows children with disabilities to be included easily and naturally, convey a powerful message about human value: all types of children can play together and have fun.

Educational experts and teachers should recognize that young children learn through movement. They learn about spatial relationships, as well as internalizing the essence of whatever they touch and move. Significant amount of time spent outdoors encourage large muscle movement and development, while the many artistic projects encourage fine motor skills (Roopnarine, Jaipaul L., et al., 2005).

Physical accessibility challenges are also prevalent in school infrastructure and facilities. In some schools, toilets are not only at the far end of the schools from the classrooms, but that the way to them is frequently torturous and extremely challenging for pupils with visual impairments. Water taps are turned on during breaks and lunchtimes only, during which children fight their way to drink. Children with visual impairments and physical impairments cannot fight their way to the water, and hence are forced to suppress their thirst (ACPF, 2011b).

2.4.3 Arrangement of play areas and materials

Play is important to the young child's health. Play increase affiliation with peers, releases tension, advances cognitive development, increase exploration and increase the probability that children will converse and interact with each other. While children interacting they practice the roles they will assume later in life (Smith, 2000 cited in Santrok, 2006).

Vygotsky believes that play is one of the most important ways in which young children are able to develop child-initiated, self-directed activity. Play makes deeply important contribution to the zone of potential development. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development. (Vygotsky, 1978 cited in Santrok, 2006). This theory considered play to be an excellent setting for cognitive development. He was especially interested in the symbolic and makes believe aspect of play. So parents should encourage play because it advances the child's cognitive development especially creative thought (Santrok, 2006).

According to Freud and Erikson, play is an especially useful form of human adjustment, helping the child master anxieties and conflicts. Children may feel less threatened and be more likely to express their true feelings in the context of play (Santrok, 2006).

Piaget (1962) advocates that play advances children's cognitive development. Play permits children to practice their competencies and acquired skills in a relaxed, pleasurable way. Piaget thought that cognitive structures need to be exercised, and play provides the perfect setting for this exercise (Santrok, 2006).

Arrangement of space in to clearly defined places to play using visible boundaries to separate play areas, helps children to focus on the play materials in each area and promotes complex play and interactions with peers.

Careful attention should be paid to the variety and balance of play materials available to children. Materials furnished should encourage all types of play and all aspects of development in young children (for instance. motor skills, social competence, cognitive abilities, creativity, language skills, and literacy).The most important consideration for preschool classroom is the social value of play social competence (Bruce, 2011). Thus, it is crucial for teachers to be alert to factors that set the stage for peer play.

In general, the materials provided to young children should represent the diversity that children see around them, including diversity. Materials such as books, puzzles, dolls, and other play materials that depict children with disabilities should be present in early childhood settings. Representation of children with diverse abilities in classroom materials promotes self-esteem and attitude of acceptance and sends the message that everyone belongs (Favazza, Phillipson, &et al., 2000).

2.5 Parent school communication

The preschool years represent crucial opportunities for the development of parental involvement in children's early education as parents' active involvement in their children's learning has been shown to improve children's academic, behavioral, and social outcomes. In particular, parent school communication facilitates children's development of pre-literacy skills such as phonological awareness and letter name knowledge (Powell et al., 2010). These skills have been shown to be essential for later school success. Moreover, the transition to preschool marks the beginning of an important relationship between home and school (Powell et al., 2010).

A child's first experiences in school are often parents' first experiences as critical stakeholders in their child's formal schooling. Parent school relationship during preschool may also allow parents to develop skills in working collaboratively with school personnel. Parent involvement may be particularly important for children from low-income families. The preschool years are therefore an optimal time to establish good communication between to familiarize parents of children at-risk for academic difficulties with the skills children need to acquire prior to entering elementary school(Powell, Son, File, & Juan, (2010).

The social development of a child is influenced by parental. So, effective communication between parents and school is vital on the child's social development as his or her parents directly correlates with the relationships and social behavior the child will have throughout life. The relationship between parents and their child will also influence different aspects of his or her social development. For example, when a child is very young, the child will look to parents to see how to respond to ambiguous situations as a form of social referencing. In this manner, the child learns proper social behavior from imitating the behavior of the parents specifically; a child will learn how to address conflict from the influence of his or her parents (Papalia, Olds, et al.,2002).

Throughout each form of psychosocial development, parents play a vital role in the positive development of their child. Parents who influence the development of their child in a positive manner tend to have particular qualities and characteristics. These parents tend to be responsive, demanding, accepting and emphasize discussion and interaction (Collins, Maccoby, et al., 2000)

It is evident that parents greatly influence the development of their child. In the emotional sense, a positive parental influence can help a child establish a healthy personality and

reach identity achievement. Parents also aid in the development of their child's moral reasoning and judgment skills through supportive discussions and conversations. Lastly, a close, secure relationship between the child and his or her parents influences the social behavior of the child in the future. The environmental aspect of development is especially important in the psychosocial development of a child (Collins, Maccoby, et al., 2000).

Scholars suggest that parents' involvement in children's education may come through their participation in both home and school activities and that such parental involvement enhances children's educational achievement. It has been suggested that families that have both parents undertaking the role as disciplinarian and authoritarian and are more involved with the family have children with higher academic achievement (Walker, Hover-Dempsey, et al., 2004).

It is well-recognized that the foundation of children's development and learning depends upon the inter-contextual nature of relationships between families and schools. Both systems share the responsibility for helping children acquire knowledge and develop lifelong skills in order to live successfully in society. Family involvement in children's education is not a new concept and has long been a topic of interest among researchers, professionals working with families, and educators at all levels. A growing body of research indicates family involvement with schools results in mutually beneficial outcomes documented that young children's potential to excel depends on the environment in which they learn and the interconnections they develop within these settings (Patrikakou, Weisberg, et al., 2005).

Parents bring to the Parent-Teacher dialogue essential information about a child: historical developmental information; an understanding of a child's daily behaviors, needs, and emerging skills; and repertoire of successful interventions. Parents will be the child's life long

advocates, and their understanding of the child is critical in long-term effective programming (Roopnarine, Jaipaul L., et al., 2005).

Major roles in relation to parents (Roopnarine, Jaipaul L., et al., 2005),

1. Facilitating a child's growth through parent contact by listening to parent input and wishes and incorporating these in to reflect the child's participation not only in school but also at home and in the community.
2. Supporting and empowering parents in their parenting role can build positive and trusting relationships with parents begins with respecting their love and hopes for their child, soliciting and listening to their ideas and concerns, and sharing one's own questions.
3. Providing resources begins with developing an understanding of family strengths and needs and natural ways to help them meet their needs. This may include forwarding information, financial aid, counseling and referrals to agencies or support groups.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research methods, sources of data collection, the instrument used for data collection and data analysis.

3.1 Research design

The focus of this study was tantamount to assess the current practice of early childhood education for children with visual impairment at German Church School. In order, to meet the purpose, qualitative study approach was employed. Qualitative research tends to focus on exploring. In as much detail as possible, smaller number of instances or an example which is seen as being interesting or illuminating, and aims to achieve ‘depth’ rather than ‘breadth’ (Creswell, 1994).

Since the research approach is qualitative that takes place in natural settings and employs a combination of observations, interviews, focus group discussion, and document reviews enables the researcher to develop a level of fact with high involvement in the actual experiences.

3.2 Data Sources

Primary and secondary data sources were used in this research. Qualitative data were collected mainly from primary sources through interview, FGD and Observations which used as primary sources. Secondary data were also collected from, teaching manuals, lesson plans and educational trainings for special need teachers.

3.3 Participants of the study

To conduct this study participant was taken purposefully from German Church School. All nine mothers of children with visual impairment from the beginner class and five teachers, one social worker and the school principal were selected purposefully. Also a special needs education expert from Yeka sub city was chose purposefully to carry out the study.

3.4 Instrument Development and Data collection Process

Principally the interview, FGD and observation instruments were checked by the academic advisor and instruments were translated into English language.

3.4.1 Interview Instruments

Semi structured interview for parents, social worker, school director, and the sub city special needs education representative and teachers' focus group discussion was employed to collect the primary data and was expected to give related information to the study. Semi structured interview provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2007).

To make clear the interviewee (Parents, teachers, social worker, the principal and representative from Yeka Sub City), the interviewer briefly explained the objectives of the study.

Interview for parents

Parent's interview instrument was developed and conducted in relation to assess the practices of early childhood education for children with visual impairment at German Church School in terms of educational activities, parents' school communication and the school support. The total time of the interview process was taken 30 minutes for each mother. The interview was conducted in Amharic language and faces to face in the school compound.

Interview for school Principal

The school principal interview was done by the researcher at German Church School. The interview covered issues associated with the practices of ECE at German Church School. More specifically, teachers' trainings, the school support and the challenges while teaching children with visual impairment in beginner class.

Interview for School Social Worker

The school social worker interview was conducted intended to cover issues related to the objective, the school support and challenges in supporting preschool children with visual impairment.

Interview for Yeka Sub City education Office

The interview was performed by the researcher in Yeka Sub City. The interview covered issues related to the current practice of early childhood education considering to children with visual impairment in the sub city. Also to assess the specific tasks working on making the preschools accessible for children with visual impairment.

3.4.2 Teachers Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion (FGD) was found to be useful for exploring issues in groups, where attention to group dynamics and to discussion content allows participants to interact and co-create the research data (Nelson, Loffler & Hanson, 2009).

Teachers' focus group interview was conducted to gather information on the current practice of ECE at German Church School relating to instructional practices, the teachers' trainings and skills support in daily living and social skills; and parent teachers' communication and the accessibility of materials in the classroom and outside of the classroom physical

environment. The focus group discussion means of communication was Amharic language and the process of the interview were recorded by audio material after taking the consent of each participant. The interview was facilitated by the researcher and was carried out at German Church School which was chosen for their convenience. The whole process of the FGD was taken 60 minutes.

3.4.3 Document Review

The researcher reviewed, teaching manuals, lesson plans and educational trainings for special needs teachers. Therefore, based on the aim of the study, these mentions accessible and relevant documents were examined.

3.4.4 Observation

Observation is a technique that can be used when data cannot be collected through other means, or those collected through other means are of limited value or are difficult to validate. Hence, observing them in those situations is more valid. Because of this, classroom and outdoor physical environment observation were used in relation to physical accessibility and instructional practices.

3.5 Data analysis

Because of the study used qualitative type of data, thematic data analysis technique was used to analyze the qualitative data. This was performed as follows: Before starting the analysis, to understand the data, the researcher read the collected and documented row data that were gathered from interview questions, FGD, observation and document reviews based on the respondents response and observations of the researcher that describes the condition or the occurrences under the study. Subsequently, the researcher grouped findings and analyzed using

thematic data analysis. Findings were interpreted and judged against the idea in the literature review.

To increase the reliability of the findings, the researcher used data by triangulation using data from respondents that are obtained through different methods. As a result, the weakness or bias of any of the methods or data sources was offset by the strengths of another.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The researcher identified the key informants with whom to begin the interview process and discussion was made with all participants of the study. The discussion enclosed information relating to the researcher's consent to the research course of what the study examines the right to withdraw participation at any process of the research, the right of getting any clear information about the study and insuring confidentiality of the participants' identity and responses. Consequently the researcher obtained consent of all participants both in verbal and written form to start the interview process.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is composed of five major parts. The first part describes the basic feature of respondents' characteristics. Part two describes teaching instructional practices. Part three discusses about the accessibility of the classroom and outside of the classroom physical environment. Following this, the communication between parents and school discussed. The last part of this chapter addresses the good practices and challenges in supporting preschool children with visual impairment.

Age, sex and impairment characteristics of children

The number of Children in beginner class is nine and age is 4-7. From these, two females and the remaining seven children are male. From the total, eight children are blind and one child has low vision.

4.1 Background characteristics of Respondents

To describe the assessment of the practices of early childhood education for children with visual impairment in the study area, the researcher gathered information from nine mothers of children with visual impairment through interview and focus group discussion conducted with 5 members of teachers. In addition data were also collected from the school principal, school social worker and the sub-city education Bureau.

4.1.1 Teacher respondent characteristics

Respondents sex distribution was two males and three females with teaching experiences in years from 5 – 28 in the school. Pertaining to the respondents' educational status, two male

teachers presented with MA degree. The remaining three female teachers presented with Diploma and currently they are candidates of an undergraduate degree program. The respondents teaching experience in the school as well educational status is valuable information to assess the practices of early childhood education at German Church School.

Concerning the skills and trainings, teachers have got skill trainings related to support children with special needs. The trainings conducted, teaching children with visual impairment was the main. Because of this, all teachers have got skill trainings in teaching children with visual impairment.

4.1.2 Mothers respondent characteristics

Age	Educational level of mothers interviewed			
30-38	Illiterate	Read and Write	Grade 12 certificate	college Degree
	1	5	2	1

The respondents are mothers of children with visual impairment. Pertaining to the respondents' occupational characteristics, five mothers are day laborers and two mothers engaged in selling “ Injera” to support their family. Also from the remaining two mothers, one mother engaged in hair dressing and the other mother is working as a technician. This information is valuable for this study to demonstrate the mother's level of education and job characteristics in relation to seeing the school support.

4.2. Instructional practice

Currently, there is a teaching manual for those children who have visual problems that are specially designed to teach children brail alphabet reading and writing. The manual has

separated into five levels and mainly focuses on the tactual, identification of Amharic alphabets, word formatting, English alphabet and writing. Level one is the first step to teaching children with tactile and models. Level two focus on letters, words and numbers and level three consist of sentences and punctuations. From level one up to three prepared in Amharic and children start learning English letters at level four. Level five concentrates on writing skills both in Amharic and English. Furthermore, daily living skills, orientation and mobility, skills in socialization are taught.

4.2.1 Instructional practice for socio-emotional development

Interactions of children with others in the early childhood education environment exert a powerful positive influence on children's social and emotional development. Visual impairment will interfere with a child's ability to observe appropriate social behaviors and to learn basic life skills. Social and life skills that other children learn naturally through observing others and modeling must be taught specifically to the student with visual impairment (Carney, Engbretson& et.al, 2003).

Preschool teachers support young students' developing self-concepts by talking with them about their actions and accomplishment and by always complying with their feelings and cultures. In relation to this, the special needs teachers provide materials to foster feelings of competence using regular puzzles, model shapes and they teach them to know their gender identity. Also they teach students to demonstrate respect for others. In addition teachers help children develop appropriate language to use when expressing feelings such as anger and sadness while they are interacting.

In relation to helping children with visual impairment to improve their social interaction, teachers identified social skills as being important to learn well. FGD reports show that, teachers

regularly include the specific social skills in their lessons. For example, respondent said “I ask my students to play along together”. One respondent was also mentioned her advice parents to encourage their children to play along with their siblings and age mates. However, one teacher respondent said that “children focus on playing rather than learning” and considered this as a challenge in teaching children with visual impairment. However, the reports from the observation revealed that less attention is given to children engage in activities like cooperative play which promote interactions with peers. Concerning to the moral development of the children, the teachers teach children ethics. For instance: not to steal, not to lie, respecting each other and not to insult.

A strategy is followed by teachers, is considered as teacher centered and students are not active participants. Instruction totally neglect storytelling creative movement, pretend play, and role-playing that help children interpret and express a wide range of feelings related to self and others with appropriate words and actions. However, these strategies advised as the key age fitting method to enhance the moral development of children in the current ECE curriculum of Ethiopia.

4.2.2 Instructional practice for physical and health development

Physical development influence how children interact with the physical environment. Therefore, the ECE environment should be organized to support both indoor and outdoor activities that maximize each child’s opportunities to develop gross- and fine-motor skills as well as personal care, safety and body awareness. So, preschools are expected to create a wide range of concrete, developmentally appropriate, indoor and outdoor experiences each day to assist the development of each child.

Depending on the report of observations, teachers not observed while facilitating activities that promote specific movement skills. Strategies in planning individual and small-group activities in fostering the development of gross motor skills movement games, dancing, and outdoor play is totally lost. In addition to that, there are no activities observed during the study period performed by the teachers lead.

In other ways, the classroom activities supported with a variety of materials that promote fine-motor skills. For instance, puzzles, model shapes, dolls and push buttons. Also this coupled with activities picking up and sorting items.

Pertaining to body awareness and personal care, teachers' help children identify their body parts through touching and pointing and asking to show their body parts. To promote children's understanding of safety within the context of everyday routines like clean up spills to prevent falling is carried out by the special needs teachers. However, supports in recognizing and interpreting features and locations in their environment not observed.

To develop the skills of children regarding personal care, students learn appropriate hand washing before and after every meal. However, the strategies practiced to teach is not considered the importance of making the child to express their every day experience through play and helping them to develop their body awareness through singing which are suggested as the main instructional strategies in the current ECE curriculum of the nation is not practicing.

4.2.3 Instructional practice for language and literacy development

The German Church School beginner class teacher uses the brail teaching manual as the main teaching guide and the manual mainly focuses on language and literacy. Instruction is focused on Amharic and English Alphabets, word reading, and writing. However, teachers not

employed songs, rhymes, activities, and discussions to facilitate the language skills of the children.

As many literatures recommend, teacher practices should take place in an integrated and play-based approach to learning. All preschool environments, activities, and interactions should be intended to encourage speaking and listening, literacy exploration, and growing reading and writing activities (New Jersey State Department of Education, 2013).

Concerning to the instructional practice of the teachers in developing speaking ability of children, teachers were observed in creating conversations, questions, and reflections upon the conversation. But, classroom activities that encourage interactions like dramatic play and storytelling are not practicing.

Blind children learn through listening, so it is imperative for the child developing good listening skills. Teachers should provide listening skills as an integral part of the language in the classroom and children with visual impairment are benefited from these activities. In addition, teachers work in order to increase students' perceptual awareness and interpretation of environmental sounds. Teachers help students to enhance their listening skill through differentiate between different sounds; through locate the direction of sounds; and associate sounds with objects and situations. In addition, teacher helps children by giving objects or model shapes to associate the sound of a given object to increase their awareness. On the contrary teachers not using stories, songs as a collective developmentally appropriate teaching strategy for preschoolers.

Teachers should help the child with visual impairment to acquire skills of Braille writing to use the Braille. As Braille proficiency increases, teachers should teach the use of a slate and

stylus (Carney, Engbretson&et.A1, 2003). Accordingly, teachers of the school educate students of Braille skills (use of slates and stylus) with giving much emphasis.

4.2.4 Instructional practice for Mathematical skill

Young children need ongoing opportunities to develop their mathematical thinking. In addition to daily opportunities for independent choice and exploration, preschool classroom time should be regularly allotted for in depth, small group math experiences that encourage children to interact, pursue problem solving strategies and reflect. Teachers should facilitate a supportive learning environment by continuously observing, listening and scaffolding children's algebraic thinking in everyday contexts (New Jersey State Department of Education, 2013).

There are gaps in the student's general knowledge that would normally have been gained through visual observation. Adaptations and equipment for children with visual impairments should be incorporated into the student's mathematics program to enhance learning. Hence, special needs teachers use puzzles and abacus to teach young children numbering.

Concerning to identification of shapes and special awareness, teachers use the Braille printing papers with different kinds of geometrical shapes and tactile materials e.g. puzzles of varying complexity, items to fill and empty, fit together and take apart, or arrange and shape materials that move.

Relating to promoting measuring and comparing skills of children with visual impairments, special needs teachers use sticks, rulers and comparing children height to help children to identify small and big; short and tall. In addition, they provide buttons for children to order and follow patterns.



Picture 1: Teaching aids intended to teach mathematical skills (Abacus puzzles, and model shapes).

4.2.5 Support in daily living skills

Self help skills are important in order to develop a child's self-esteem. Specially is very significant for a child with visual impairments since the fact that the child loses his/her sight. A child with a visual impairment may miss out crucial details about daily activities. Therefore children with visual impairment would require direct instruction in the skills that are at their developmental level. Intensive training will likely be necessary for basic skills.

As teachers explained, most of the time, children with visual impairment didn't get the chance to acquire basic skills at home, so the primary step while this children joined the program is teaching them to be familiar with their environment and following that life skills in proper hand wash, washing face, toiletry, eating, drinking, wearing clothes, tying shoes, is prearranged.

4.2.6 Orientation and Mobility training

Children with visual impairment need to be exposed to a wide range of experiences and exploratory activities. Their understanding of basic concepts should be evaluated to indicate needs for direct teaching. Apart from teaching in daily living skills, teachers provide orientation and mobility skills for children with visual impairment in beginner class. It is obvious that many children with visual impairments come from different families, but most of them were unlucky to

get appropriate daily living skills and mobility trainings in their surrounding environment.

Because of this, skilled teachers provide orientation and mobility training for children with visual impairments in beginner class. For instance using stairs, moving in the classroom, finding own sitting place and accessing classrooms, offices, toilets and washing sinks.

It is important to ensure that each child moves within the community as much as possible while explaining and allowing exploration of what is experienced (Sacks & Wolfe, 2006).

4.3 Accessibility of Classroom and Outdoor Physical Environment

4.3.1 Classroom physical environment

Classroom environment is widely recognized in the special needs education field that if a setting is developmentally appropriate for a typical child it will also be appropriate for a child with visual impairment (Bruce, 2011). As the findings revealed, indoor materials find out better when it is compared to the outdoor services. Significant classroom materials that can be touched are presented and children can access, for instance shelves, wooden chairs and tables puzzles (plastic and wooden), model shapes, toys, brail books, and mathematical instruments like the abacus.

The classroom pathway is not clear and the tables and chairs cover much of the space and there is no free space to play by using materials on the floor. In relation to this, teachers responded that classroom space is not allowing the students to move freely in the classroom. The classroom entrance is accessible for all children and has stairs as well as ramps, so children can enter the room easily. The classroom light is bright and has electricity as well as windows. The chairs and tables are not separated and designed to use for three children together. But it is not comfortable for the children while they are learning and need to be age appropriate (see figure 2).



Picture 2: Inside classroom space, furniture and arrangement of teaching materials.

4.3.2 Outside of Classroom Physical Environment

Careful attention should be given to the variety and balance of play materials available to children. Materials furnished should encourage all types of play and all aspects of development in young children. For instance: motor skills, social competence, cognitive abilities, creativity, language skills, and literacy (Santrok, 2006).



Picture 3: Toilet

Picture 3: washing sink.

The researcher was observed that toilets, washing sinks, and pathways are accessible. (See chart 3). However, outside of the classroom materials are not fulfilled due to the compound

being small to accommodate some additional playing materials. Teacher respondents were also responded that. Sometimes the school environment is not fulfilled with vital playing equipment. (See figure 4).



Picture 4: Play ground

4.4 Parent School Communication

According to studies, the foundation of children's development and learning depends upon the inter-contextual nature of relationships between families and schools (DeVore&Russel, 2007). The study sees that. There is an already existing practice of meeting parents twice a year, to discuss the prevailing problems in relation to the overall teaching learning process of children with visual impairment. The school uses these meetings as an opportunity to provide a piece for parents to appreciate their children and to avoid presenting sadness and crying in front of their child face while anybody is asking about their child status. In addition, teachers were mentioned they teach parents to look their children the same as other kids and to encourage them to interact with others.

However, the study finds out that, there is not a regular contact between parents and teachers to discuss matters related to child development and learning performance

improvements. In this regards all interviewed mothers of children with visual impairments stated that they never discussed with teachers about how their children interacting with classmates in school. Two mothers were given that. They meet with administrators to speak about problems and discussed with teachers to make out their child's progress. But, all respondents were responded that they don't talk with their child's teacher in relation to school work expected the child to practice at home. In addition, all mothers responded that, they do not know what child is learning and one mother reported that she is not able to support her child at home since she doesn't know what her child is learning and how to help a blind child. So this finding discloses the communication between the school and the parents are very low. Encouragingly, it was observed that one volunteer mother is assisting teachers by reading books in the classroom for the kids.

4.5 Good practices in supporting Children with Visual Impairment

4.5.1 Educational support

Based on the information collected from the City Administration of Addis Ababa Education Bureau and Yeka Sub City Education Bureau, current number of children with visual impairment in Early Childhood Education programs and there is no other school registered that currently enrolling blind children at the preschool level. So the German Church School beginner class considered as a good practice for other schools in supporting preschool children with visual impairment. The Bureau representative stated that, the bureau has been doing a number of things for children with disabilities; especially for primary and secondary school children with visual impairment, the Bureau published books on brail and modified books with sign language for children with visual and hearing impairment respectively.

Teacher of students with visual impairments is the center of education for the child with a visual impairment. This is the expert who has skills in how visual impairment affects the child's development and learning, as well as the strategies and tools that can help the child learn about environment, perform everyday activities, and participate in the general curriculum and other activities in school. German Church School teachers give special support for children with visual impairment; many teachers of the school have special trainings in teaching children with visual impairments and children with special needs. Because of this, teachers care for students with visual impairments in the same way with other cited students apart from the special considerations needed. The school encourages students with visual impairments to be involved in every school activities and events and educational field trips.

In general educational support is a right and imperative for every child. Currently, German Church School is taking significant measures to ensure educational access of children with visual impairment in partnership with aid organizations. On the subject of supporting mother said. *“I was knocking many kindergartens to place my child; contrarily all of them were not willing to admit a child like her. Because they said they don’t have special support. Fortunately by the recommendation of Menelik Hospital my child gets educational access and I found the school very welcoming and supportive for my child. I feel like my child gets cure. In the earlier time I bring her school by holding on my back, but now she is trying to walk and they make her to do physical exercise. I am very thankful.”*

4.5.2 School Feeding

School feeding program contributes expansive to the development of the child as well as future development of the country. School feeding is a very important tool for quality education and health improvements of children, which lead to a greater earning potential later in life. The

probable impact goal of targeting children through school feeding program is to increase their educational achievement so as to improve their potential future productivity and earnings.

School feeding programs increase school attendance and this leads to more time spent in school and more time spent towards learning. Alleviate short term hunger which improves children's cognitive functioning and attention span (Buttenheim et al. 2011).

As the social worker and the principal stated, many students come from poor families even those who couldn't fulfill their everyday meal sufficiently. Many children come to school without having breakfast and unable to concentrate on their school work when they are hungry. Considering this, The German Church School is providesnack (bread, banana and milk) while the students stay at school. Simply the school feeding program helps children to perform better in school.

4.5.3 Economic support

Children with disabilities and their families constantly face social, political and economic barriers that adversely affect their development and prevent them from being included in society and enjoying their basic human rights to the fullest. Even if they do get a job, children may have to be placed in unsafe environments, denying them the opportunity to play and socialize with their peers (Workneh et al., 2009).

The study finding revealed. Parents encountered economic problems due to loss of jobs as a result of taking care of a child with visual impairment. Parents of children with visual impairment are less likely to be able to employ as required in order to care for children with visual impairment forces them to stay half of the day at home. This creates economic problem within the family and the parents' become unable to fulfill the family's basic necessities. To tackle this problem, the school social support unit is providing financial support for the children

as well as their parents. In this regard, the school support program reduces the economic burden of families. The startup capital donation were also given for two families to start their own business and to become self reliant. For instance, the support prevents a child and his family from living in the street and the mother said *“Previously I was living in a plastic house with my children. I have seen hope in my family starting from the time the German Church School helped me by renting a house from private owners and prevents my children from street life”*.

4.5.4 Medical support

German Church School provides Medical support for children who are attending their education under the school support program. Many families cannot cover the medical expenses of their children. Because. Most of them employing as a day laborer and earn very low amount of income. In this regard, the school established a mini clinic and gives emergency services while the students stay at school. In addition to that, the school covers all medical expenses when the student needs a referral for more advanced medical support in other health care centers aim to improve the health status of children as well as their families, the school nurse teach parents and guardians about family planning, reproductive health, personal and environmental hygiene.

Medical support is very important to maintain a healthy condition of children living in extreme poverty. One mother said *“I was worried when I was informed my son needs urgent surgical treatment because I know that I couldn’t cover all his medical expenses. Thanks to German Church School, all the staffs were very empathetic and helped me a lot during my son stayed in the hospital”*.

4.6 Challenges

According to the Yeka sub city special needs education department report currently there are no public or private preschools admitted blind children in the sub city. With regarding to

children with visual impairment at preschool, there are not any relevant activities done to bring children with visual impairment to attend preschools.

Depending upon the study findings, the German Church School beginner class face challenges in providing age appropriate instructions. Also, lacks documentations for recording children day to day academic activities and progress. Besides, teachers disregarded the use of lesson planning to support the teaching learning process. However, it is considered as a very important tool in providing all educational aspects is thought as it is the expected timeframe, the fact that the plan will assist to monitor the children academic progress. This can be considered as the challenge for the beginner class. In relation to this, teachers and the principal pointed out that, the school is less performed in recording the development of children.

The school principal was also stated the challenge in implementing beginner class program is children come from different kinds of families and have many economic and other related problems. However, the school by itself can't solve all problems of children as well as their families.

Teachers were described some of the challenges while they are teaching children with visual impairments at beginner class as follows,

- *“Due to lack of understanding and missing support from parents, we are challenged to make the children ready for the next grade level as we have planned.”*
- *“Lack of adequate playing materials and playing area.”*

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

According to the City Administration of Addis Ababa Education Bureau and Yeka Sub City Education Bureau, there are no any statistics presented on the current status of blind children at preschool level except primary and secondary education. This implies, focus was not granted to children with visual impairment in joining preschools. So the German Church School beginner class can be seen as a good practice and a model for other schools in supporting preschool children with visual impairment.

In relation to instructional practices, the Brail teaching manual is the primary teaching guide at German Church School beginner class. However, teaching practices don't follow age appropriate instruction the way which is recommended in the current ECE curriculum of the country. Instructions somehow give attention for the socio emotional, physical and language development of children. However, instruction related to support children in recognizing and interpreting features and locations in their environment is overlooked.

Instruction is failed to notice the value of storytelling creative movement, singing, and role-playing that helps children interpret and express a wide range of feelings related to self and others with appropriate words and actions. Through play children can learn best and improved their holistic developments. However, play is the most unnoticed part and children are treating the same way like other grade students. In addition, there is not any individual or group play guided by the teachers. But this strategies advice as the key age appropriate strategies to increase the development of children in the current ECE curriculum of Ethiopia, 2008. As per to the

findings, teachers not prepare a lesson plan for classroom activities. However, in teaching learning process, lesson planning is considered as a very important tool to ensure all educational aspects are thought as it is the expected time frame.

Concerning to the skills and trainings of teachers in teaching children with visual impairments, the study finds out that, teachers have got skill trainings in relation to helping children with special needs in different circumstances. The trainings conducted teaching children with visual impairment is a fundamental.

The classroom is accessible and children visual impairment can enter the room easily. The pathways, water taps and toilets are also favorable and accessible. Concerning to indoor gross motor activities absolutely lost as well there are no outdoor materials specially prepared for these children. Also, the chairs and tables are not separated and intended for use for three children along and somehow not comfortable for the children while they are learning. The outdoor surface is quite enough and can children move safely despite the fact that there are not any outdoor materials specially prepared for these children in the program.

Communication between the school and parents is found out minimal, and the school has a schedule to meet with parents twice per year to solve problems in relation to the child as well as the family. However, it is not highlighting for family role at home in supporting children with visual impairments since the schedule gives low possibility to discuss with parents.

The school social support unit is providing snack, financial, medical and guidance and counseling support. In this regard, the school support program reduces problems of children with visual impairment and their families. Generally, support is replicable to other ECE programs.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings of the present study and in accordance, with recent research findings the following recommendations are given for teachers and the school administration.

1. Based on the findings of the study, teaching strategies practice unnoticed the value of storytelling, singing, creative movement, pretend play, and role-playing that help children to promote their holistic development. So the school needs to forward lessons as per to the Ministry of Education current ECE curriculum to provide age appropriate instructions.
2. The research finds out that. Teachers do not prepare a daily lesson plan which helps them to lead the teaching learning process. As a result, the administration of the school needs to follow up teachers to develop a lesson plan and make ensure all educational aspects are thought as it is the expected time. Furthermore, the plan will assist to monitor the children academic progress.
3. The school compound is not suitable to accommodate indoor and outdoor play materials since the compound is small and accommodating more than two hundred children at one shift. But it can be organized by putting small movable playing materials outside of the classroom.
4. The research finding identified that, parents of children with visual impairment, never been discussed with teachers on how their children interacting and school activities the child is expected practice at home. Also the parents have no idea what their children are learning in the school. Because of this, the school needs to awake parents of children with visual impairment from beginner class regarding what is taught to their children and on how to assist their children at home.

5. The research finding discloses that. Lack of documentations in recording the child's day to day academic activities and progress are the main challenges for the beginner class. Consequently, the school needs to develop documentation of the children academic progress to evaluate the teaching activities and performance of the children. Also will be helpful to improve further intervention strategies.
6. The research finds that, the information gathered from the City Administration of Addis Ababa Education Bureau and Yeka Sub City Education Office. There is no school those currently enrolling blind children at the preschool level except primary and secondary schools. This implies, focus was not granted to children with visual impairment to join preschools like other children without disabilities. Thus, the City Administration, sub-city as well as the schools, advisable to make the programs accessible for children with visual impairment.
7. To solve the financial, awareness creation and fulfilling some materials which are very useful for children with development working in collaboration with different stakeholders, the government should devise incentives to encourage private sectors to involve in providing for preschool service for children with visual impairments.

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