



**LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS, PRACTICES, AND CHALLENGES IN PRIVATE  
PRESCHOOLS AND GOVERNMENT O-CLASSES OF OROMIA REGIONAL  
STATE AND ADDIS ABABA CITY ADMINISTRATION**

by

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**DECLARATION**

I here by declare that this dissertation entitled "Leadership Behaviors, Practices and Challenges in Private Preschools and Government O-Classes of Oromia Regional State and Addis Ababa City Administration" is my own work and has not been previously submitted to this University or any other higher learning institution in application for admission or graduation to a degree, diploma, or other qualifications.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, *Diribe Gelmessa Melka*. You shan't be forgotten, for your selflessness, sheer determination, and trust you bestowed upon me during my early years of school life.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL.....	ii
DECLARATION .....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
ACRONYMS.....	xiii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	xiv
ABSTRACT.....	xvi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background of the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem .....	7
1.3 Research Questions .....	11
1.4 Objectives of the Study .....	11
1.5 Significance of the Study .....	12
1.6 Scope of the Study.....	13
1.7 Definition of Key Terms .....	14
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE.....	17
2.1 Early Childhood Care and Education: Meaning and Nature.....	17

2.1.1 Care and Education in ECCE .....	18
2.1.2 Historical Accounts of Early Childhood Care and Education .....	22
2.1.2.1 Early Childhood Care and Education in the World. ....	22
2.1.2.2 Early Childhood Care and Education in Ethiopia.....	24
2.1.3 Benefits of Early Childhood Care and Education .....	27
2.1.3.1 Economic Benefits.....	27
2.1.3.2 Social Benefits. ....	27
2.1.3.3 Cognitive and Emotional Development.....	28
2.2 Leadership Defined .....	30
2.3 Leadership Behavior .....	32
2.4 Leadership in Early Childhood Education .....	36
2.5 The Leadership of ECCE in Cultivating Teachers OCB.....	41
2.5.1 How Do ECCE Leaders Cultivate Teachers OCB?.....	43
2.6 Pedagogical Leadership.....	47
2.6.1 Pedagogical Leadership in ECCE.....	50
2.6.1.1 Active Learning Pedagogy .....	52
2.6.1.1.1 Why Active Learning Pedagogy Matters? .....	53
2.6.1.1.1 Active Learning Pedagogy: Ethiopian Context .....	54
2.7 Conceptual Framework of the Study.....	55

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	60
3.1 The Research Approach .....	60
3.2 Why Qualitative Study? .....	61
3.3 Qualitative Case Study Design.....	66
3.4 The Research Setting.....	67
3.5 Sampling Method and Participants .....	68
3.6 Data Collection Methods.....	72
3.6.1 Interview .....	72
3.6.2 Observation.....	75
3.6.3 Document Review .....	75
3.7 Data Collection Process .....	76
3.8 Data Analysis .....	77
3.9 Validation Strategies .....	78
3.10 Statement of Reflexivity.....	78
3.11 Ethical Considerations.....	79
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....	81
4.1 Results .....	81
4.1.1 The Research Sites.....	81
4.1.2 Participant Profiles .....	83
4.1.3 The Key Themes that Emerged from the Analysis of Data.....	91

4.1.4 Early Childhood Education Leaders’ Assignment .....	93
4.1.4.1 The Primary School Principals.....	93
4.1.4.2 Appointment in Private Preschools: Owners’ Goodwill and Competition.....	98
4.1.4.3 Females as the Preferred ECCE Leaders. ....	99
4.1.5 The Leadership Behavior of ECCE Leaders .....	102
4.1.5.1 Telling (Directing). ....	102
4.1.5.2 Selling (Coaching): .....	105
4.1.5.3 Participating. ....	106
4.1.5.4 Delegating (Empowering).....	107
4.1.5.5 Caring Leadership.....	111
4.1.6 Organizational Citizenship Behavior in ECCE Leadership .....	114
4.1.6.1 ECCE teachers OCB.....	114
4.1.6.2 ECCE Leaders OCB .....	118
4.1.7 The Employment of Pedagogical Leadership in ECCE Centers .....	120
4.1.7.1. Professionalism of the ECCE Leadership.....	120
4.1.7.1.1 Active Learning Pedagogy.....	126
4.1.7.1.2 The Playfulness of the Learning Environment. ....	129
4.1.7.1.3 The Merger of “O”-Class Children of Different Ages.....	136
4.1.8 Challenges of Leadership in Early Childhood Care and Education .....	143
4.1.8.1 Pedagogical Challenges.....	143

4.1.8.1.1 Adopting Foreign Curriculum .....	144
4.1.8.1.2 Inadequacy of Suitable ECCE Books .....	146
4.1.8.1.3 Lack of Child-Friendly Assessment Mechanisms .....	148
4.1.8.2 Administrative Challenges .....	150
4.1.8.3 Structural Challenges.....	154
4.1.8.3.1 Independent ECCE Leader .....	154
4.1.8.3.2 Weak and Intermittent Relationship.....	156
4.1.8.4 Attitudinal Challenges. ....	157
4.1.8.4.1 Failure to Trust the Home-Made ECCE Curriculum.....	157
4.1.8.4.2 Flimsy Government Attention .....	159
4.1.8.4.3 Insufficient Parental Engagement in the ECCE Program.....	162
4.2 Discussion .....	165
4.2.1 Early Childhood Education Leaders’ Assignment .....	166
4.2.2 The Leadership Behavior of ECCE Leaders .....	169
4.2.3 Organizational Citizenship Behavior in ECCE leadership.....	174
4.2.4 The Employment of Pedagogical Leadership in ECCE Centers .....	177
4.2.5 Challenges of Leadership in Early Childhood Education .....	187

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	203
5.1 Summary of Major Findings .....	203
5.2 Conclusions .....	210
5.3 Recommendations .....	213
REFERENCES .....	219
APPENDICES	

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Number of Selected ECCE Centers .....	70
Table 2: Participants and Sites of the Study.....	71
Table 3: Summary of ECCE Leader Participant Profiles.....	86
Table 4: Summary of Teacher Participant Profiles .....	89
Table 5: Summary of Parent and Expert Participant Profiles .....	91
Table 6: The Emerged Themes of the Study.....	92
Table 7: Frequencies of Responses Related to Leadership Behavior .....	110

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: The Five Dimensions of Organizational Citizenship Behaviors.....	43
Figure 2: Conceptual Framework: the Interacting Components of the ECCE Leadership.....	58
Figure 3: ECCE Leaders Situational Leadership Behavior Continuum .....	109
Figure 4: The Current ECCE Administrative Relationship .....	157

## ACRONYMS

- CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child
- ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education
- ECD: Early Childhood Development
- ECE: Early Childhood Education
- EFA: Education for All
- ESDP: Education Sector Development Program
- GER: Gross Enrollment Ratio
- ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education
- KG: Kindergarten
- LKG: Lower Kindergarten
- UKG: Upper Kindergarten
- NECCEPF: National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy Framework
- NER: Gross Enrollment Ratio
- OCB: Organizational Citizenship Behavior
- OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
- UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children
- UNESCO: United Nation Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
- UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore the leadership of Early Childhood Education (ECCE) in the Ethiopian landscape. More specifically, the study investigated ECCE leaders' assignment, their leadership behavior, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) in ECCE, the use of pedagogical leadership in ECCE centers, and challenges of leadership in ECCE. Guided by the constructivist paradigm, the study adopted a multisite qualitative case study. Semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis were utilized to gather relevant data. Of these, the semi-structured interview was the dominant data garnering protocol. A total of 21 study participants of the diverse profile were purposefully chosen from six ECCE centers found in Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa city administration and interviewed. The data collected were presented, analyzed, organized, and reported in themes along the five key specific objectives mentioned above. An inductive method of data analysis, mainly cross-case analysis, was used to group similar ideas gathered from participants of the study. The study revealed a number of results. To begin with, the study indicated that the ECCE center's leadership assignment lacked professionalism. None of the principals were also qualified for the job and no ECCE principals training scheme is in place. On a positive note, despite lacking the required training, female ECCE principals were found to deliver better than their male counterparts. Apart from that, irrespective of the type of the ECCE center, leaders were found to exhibit telling, selling, participating, delegating, and caring leadership behaviors in varying degrees. The data further entails the prevalence of more OCB among private ECCE center leaders than the public ones. In a similar comparison, ECCE center teachers were found to demonstrate OCB across all ECCE centers. In light of gender differences, female teachers were found to display a behavior that was more consistent with the dimensions of OCB. By and large, this study uncovered a disconnect between the practices of pedagogical leadership and what is stipulated in the 2010 national ECCE Policy Framework. In conclusion, among the multifarious challenges encountered in ECCE settings, issues related to pedagogy, administration, institutional structure, and attitude were found to be the predominant setbacks that required consideration. To make a difference, all concerned parties primarily the government should expend their concerted effort by rethinking and restructuring the presently observed ECCE units, particularly the public ones. The overall implication of all this is the greater the attention given by the government and other key players to the ECCE sector, the better opportunities created for children to fully enjoy their natural talents and grow following their natural order of care and education they deserve. Finally, the study also called for additional investigations on the leadership of ECCE, for this study might give some clues for other researchers that could help them embark further.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In the global North, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) appears to be found in a good shape. Most countries (e.g., Germany, USA, UK, Finland, Norway, South Korea, Japan, China, Ireland, and so forth) have benefited from ripe of the sector (Miller & Almon, 2009; Morabito, Vandebroek & Roose, 2013). Regarding this, Morabito et al. (2013) concur that in the process of human capital development ECCE is claimed to be "the greatest of equalizers", particularly, the ECCE programs indicated beneficial effects for disadvantaged children (p. 13). According to Morabito et al., it is also believed that ECCE has the potential to "leveling the playing field" in both developing and developed countries (p.2). In this context, the early years care and education programs represent a critical period for equalizing opportunities, and investments in ECCE appears to be beyond policy debate. Yet, variations were observed between the global South and North.

Despite the striking differences between the developing and developed world, the sector has won the attention of both economies. Informed by empirical studies, some authors (e.g., Froebel, 1897; Heckman, & Masterov, 2007; Karoly, & Levaux, 1998; Nores, & Barnett, 2010; Piaget, 1962; Psacharopoulos, 1982; Sergiovanni, 1998; Vygotsky, 1967, 1978) argue that ECCEs have a myriad of profound benefits for one's life, parents, the society, and a given country in general. Particularly, in the process of human capital development, it is believed to be the cornerstone for the overall development of a child. A longitudinal study conducted in Germany, for example, cemented a positive note on the value of ECCE (Miller & Almon, 2009). In the study, researchers compared children of the same age who were treated well and passed through the ECCE program with those who did not. Eventually, the researchers reported that children who attended the ECCE program with age-appropriate care and education excelled over the others in every area measured –

physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. Added to that, by age 15, they also remained consistent in getting the highest scores on one of the internationally recognized assessments Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) exam.

In connection with this, in 2001, one of the African summits conducted in Cairo illuminates that the purpose to invest in today's ECCE is tomorrow's peace, security, democracy, stability, and sustainable development (Zeray, 2011, p.3). Correspondingly, Teferra (2007) one of the Ethiopian veteran researchers on ECCE argued that "erecting a house without a foundation is not possible, efficient human resource development of a country heavily relies on early years of human development" (pp.205-206). The echoed aspirational voices emphasize the need to look beyond the 'Pandora box' of survival and enable children to flourish and attain their fullest potential so that they "live long, healthy, and creative lives" (Dowd, Borisova, Amente, & Yenew, 2016, p. 477). Likewise, Ültanır (2012) tends to argue that as per Piaget's classification a child below seven, at the preoperational phase of human development, who enjoys the proper care and education in the available type of ECCE program is likely to offset problems associated with cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions.

Equally, Gashaw (2014) asserted that in the ECCE centers children with caring, child-friendly, interactive, and stimulating environments are more likely to succeed in both academic and non-academic life, and are less likely to develop 'anti-social' behavior than those who are denied the opportunity. Paraphrasing Brain Development and Early Learning (2000), White (2013) writes, "eighty-five percent of the foundation for a child's intellect, personality, and skills is formed by age five" (p.3). In other words, the study has indicated, "the foundation of who we are, is formed by our fifth year" (White, 2013, p.3). More precisely, as per White, Maria Montessori, prominent for her studies in ECCE, called the developmental stage the absorbent mind stage. Therefore, based on

Montessori's idea it can be argued that in the history of human learning and development early childhood is the most sensitive and receptive stage which needs due care and emphasis.

As a whole, it is generally believed that treating children well early in life pays off. Many are in consensus illuminating that being child-friendliness displaying the caring heart and mind to the child in the formal ECCE centers, and in our informal contacts shackles our social, political, and economic ills now and in the future. As a result, it serves the purpose of breaking the intergenerational poverty cycle together with other injustices. This time, it remains a great equalizer or perhaps it narrows the gap between the haves and the have-nots that have been created due to natural and/or other factors. In the same vein, one of the recent studies conducted on ECCE (Borisova, Pisani, Dowd, & Lin, 2017) noted that governments of the world and international donor organizations have recognized the need to invest in ECCE. Borisova et al. (2017) further argued that access to ECCE could make a difference.

When it comes to Ethiopia, the situation of ECCE seems far from others experience. The government seems to implement the ECCE program as per the expected standard by stipulating ECCE frameworks (policy, programs, and strategies) in several official documents. For example, the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) (Article 36, section 1 to 5), deals with the care and education of children. Likewise, Article 41 of the 1995 constitution says, "Every Ethiopian national has the right to equal access to publicly funded social services" (p.14). Additionally, the 1994 Education and Training Policy (TGE, 1994); the 2010 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy framework; the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP-V); the Growth and Transformational Plan (GTP-I & II); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which is endorsed on Dec. 9, 1991 (Children, Youth, and Family Welfare Organization, 1992) indicated the objectives and the how of its implementation.

Nevertheless, what has been observed in the ground did not indicate its determination to safeguard the rights of children in getting access to basic education like ECCE to the level of promises made.

Despite Ethiopia's acceptance of all the above-mentioned and other international and nationally developed provisions related to child rights including the right to care and education, its observance seems dubious. Let alone by the European standard, in Africa, the present status of ECCE in Ethiopia is worrisome (Ministry of Education, 2018). For example, in 2016/2017, the comparison of Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of three African nations such as Ethiopia, Kenya, and Malawi, coupled with the United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) standard (80%) puts Ethiopia far behind them with the GER of 45 %. Malawi and Kenya's GER counts 82 % and 76 % respectively. Amazingly, Mauritius and Seychellois's record was as big as 95% and 102% respectively. This further justifies in Ethiopia the ECCE program was not a priority. Also, Dendir's (2014) study indicated that historically, in various measures of children's education, Ethiopia had a poor record. In brief, Ethiopia's situation was reported to be worse than African countries of comparable socioeconomic status.

In Ethiopia, modern ECCE came to being in 1900 in Dire Dawa during the time of Emperor Menelik II (1889–1913). The first formal ECCE, the kindergarten, was introduced by Fredrick Froebel in 1837 in Germany. Compared to the long history of its introduction, today, it is found in a rudimentary stage (Tefera, 2018). Quite a number of empirical studies conducted in Ethiopia shed light on the piecemeal development of the sector in light of access, equity, quality, and relevance (e.g., Bishaw & Lasser, 2012; Dendir, 2014; Hoot, Szente, & Mebratu, 2004; Lemma, 2014a; Rossiter, 2016; Tefera, 2018; Tigistu, 2013; Teferra, 2007; Woldehanna, 2016), where many of them noted as the government paid little attention to early education. It could in short be argued that if the country is looking for a prosperous and peaceful nation among other things, the improvement of ECCE is not a choice.

Parallel to this, Hoot, Szente, and Tadesse's (2006) study described the situation as, "given its struggle to provide universal primary education; it is little wonder that ECCE has received relatively little attention over the years" (p. 186). Surprisingly, since then, there has been a lapse of time for over a century. A recent study by Lemma (2014b) indicates that "over those years the sector has been crawling, at times deadly stagnating, cornered, and marginalized without making a meaningful move in terms of access and quality" (p.43). It could in short be argued that most of the children of this age group (4-6) have been denied from access to care and education they deserve.

According to the recent data of the Ministry of Education (2018), in (2018-2019), 7,895,161 (more than 7.8 million) Ethiopian children are eligible for the ECCE program. However, only 3,216,206, or (about 3.2 million), 40.7 % of the children aged between 4-6 attend an ECCE program (Ministry of Education, 2018). Interestingly, a recent education policy document, "The Ethiopian Education and Training Roadmap for 2018-2030," bravely admits that, nowadays, though the ECCE enrolment is improving compared to the number of legitimate child population the situation is very slow and worrisome. Added to that, the document revealed the gaps and challenges of the sector and suggests the immediate attention of the government. Specifically, among other things, the yawning gap of its governance system in general and, the leadership of ECCE, in particular, have been highlighted (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Throughout the history of the sector, the above-mentioned problems of ECCE seem to be attached to the global and local politics of education and unevenly distributed (Negash, 1996). The global and local political interests of all time have been putting their heavy hand in the development of Ethiopian education in general and ECCE in particular. Empirical studies indicate that ECCE problems seem related to the poor awareness and understandings of the concerned key players (when should be) on the benefits of the ECCE program. It can be argued that the political elites of different times (from the very time of its genesis to the present government),

policymakers, teachers, academicians, researchers, parents, and other stakeholders possibly chose a lenient position. With regards to this, one of the seminal writers of education, Negash, noted that in Ethiopia, “given 85% of the population live (sic) in the rural areas, all the way through history the education sector is very much an urban phenomenon” (Negash, 1996, p.11). To clarify the more sharpened inequalities Negash added “within the Ethiopian context, not all children are born equal. It matters a great deal where and to which parents one is born” (p.8). Finally, in general terms, he also concluded, “education in the manner it has been conceived and implemented in Ethiopia will certainly not lead to development” (p.13).

Contrary to that, it could be argued that alongside the evolving backdrops discussed earlier, the nation has not only complexities but also possibilities. To illustrate, if the presently stretched urban-based ECCEs to the rural settings (O-class, kindergarten, and child-to-child) were properly managed, made more responsive to local realities, and freed from the hegemony of Western approaches an encouraging results would be observed. Specifically, if leaders of the ECCE programs appear more responsive to the philosophy of ECCE than ever most likely children would get quality services. This time ECCE could serve as a tool to improve equity and quality in the education system. Hence, I argue that to avert the long-standing complications of the sector looking into the practices of its leadership seem relevant. With respect to this, Kofi Annan, the late Secretary-General of the United Nations, underscored “leadership is imperative if we are to improve the lives of children, their families, and communities” (Rodd, 2012, p. xi).

Thus, despite what is known about the ECCE programs, the specific focus of this study is the leadership of ECCE in Ethiopia. A recent study conducted in Ethiopia on ECCE also suggested the need to amplify the leadership role of the sector (Rossiter, 2016). This is because in most cases it is believed that other things being equal the performances of educational institutions are the reflections of their leaders. That is, mediocre ECCE leaders are very unlikely to create robust

ECCE centers. As a result, children (particularly the cornered) could be the losers. Therefore, if we think that children are the most valuable citizens of this country, as it could be true elsewhere in the world, studying the practices and challenges of ECCE leadership is found to be paramount.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The leadership of early childhood care and education has not yet received considerable research attention (Bush, 2013; Moshel & Berkovich, 2020). As stated by Moshel and Berkovich (2020), early childhood leadership is poorly emphasized including countries that place strong and consistent attention to the ECCE sector. Yet, the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) and the World Education Forum (UNESCO, 2000) underscored the indispensable benefits of ECCE for the lifetime success of a child; especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. In the North, experiences of many countries have also documented the positive effects of ECCE to the child, family, and the society at large (Ngwaru, 2014). Besides, a study conducted by Engle et al. (2011) uncovered the potential benefits of ECCE in reducing inequalities perpetuated by poverty. The implication is, if ECCE programs are well managed, the quality of education can likely be achieved.

On the contrary, a recent study by Bøe, Hognestad, and Waniganayake (2016) indicates that everyday leadership in ECCE centers is “fragmented, hectic, and complex” (p.608). Strangely enough, age-appropriate teachers and ECCE center leader’s services like child-oriented curricula, child-friendly learning environment, and play-driven pedagogy have disappeared from many of the early childhood institutions and have been substituted by lessons addressing cognitive development, more likely to match the content of standardized testing (Zewdie & Tefera, 2015; Yelland, 2005). Bassok, Latham, and Rorem’s (2015) study entitled, ‘Is kindergarten the new first grade’ noted the shift of kindergarten into de facto first grade due to the dominance of prescriptive

curricula instead of implementing child-friendly pedagogy. In relation to this, a good number of studies (e.g., Patte, 2010; Patte & Brown, 2011) warn that a play deficient child may lose the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical competencies. Consequently, the lack of these skills may lead children to adopt anti-social behaviors ranging from depression to suicide (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006).

In Africa, despite the improved understandings about the influence of academic curricula, “children are subjected to strict learning regimes” (Bar-On, 2004, p.74). Studies (e.g., Bar-On, 2004; Mghasse & William, 2016) conducted in sub-Saharan Africa- Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa appear in consensus indicating that due to poor attention offered to the leadership of ECCE centers, the trend to pursue more didactic and content-based curriculum and dictatorial sort of leadership approaches have been manifested at the expense of child-driven practices. Likewise, the study conducted in Tanzania showed that ECCE leaders faced various challenges in managing pre-primary education (Mghasse & William, 2016). Additionally, a study conducted on Early Childhood Education in Africa by Mwamwenda (2014) who sampled fifteen African countries including Ethiopia, emphasized the expansion of the program with very little aspect of its managerial processes.

The Government of Ethiopia has endorsed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on Dec. 9, 1991 (Children, Youth, and Family Welfare Organization, 1992). The introduction of the 2010 Comprehensive Early Childhood Development Policy Framework (CECDPF) has also signaled a strive that have been made to reach the disadvantaged children (Ministry of Education, 2010). Nevertheless, when we look at the current situation of the sector, it seems disgusting. For instance, as can be noted in the latest report released by the Ministry of Education, in 2018/19, out of a total of 7.8 million (Male=4 million; Female= 3.8 million) children aged 4 to 6, who deserve

access to the ECCE program, less than half or only 40.7 % (Male= 41.8 %; Female= 39.7%) of them had access to some form of preprimary education (Ministry of Education, 2018). The recently introduced component of the preprimary education called the “O”-classes’ took the lion share. It accounts for 81% or 2.1 million of the total enrollment in 2018/19.

The poor attention offered by the leadership to the established “O”-classes worsened the manifestation of playful practices for instance. Among other things, the current system seems characterized by the absence of a child-oriented teaching method, lack of budget, availability of untrained preschool teachers and a sporadic quality assurance system (Tigistu, 2013). Adding, surprisingly, none of the national planning documents have included budgets attached to them indicating one of the challenges of ECCE leadership (Mundy et al., 2014).

Moreover, many other practical problems are attached to the leadership of ECCE programs in Ethiopia. Some of these include lack of coordination and ownership among the three signatories, viz., Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Health (MoH), and Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA) (Zewdie & Tefera, 2015); the use of imported curriculum (in some private preschools) (Tefera & Hagos, 2016) at the expense of own culture and values; and the absence of clear guideline on the leadership assignment and job descriptions of these centers is one of the implementation problems.

Hence, examining how these recently introduced ECCEs (e.g., the “O”-classes) are led compared to the private preschools seem timely and imperative. Particularly, in Ethiopia, to boost the preschoolers' future chances of success, the treatment of children below seven counts. Otherwise, expansion without a vibrant leadership system in place might debilitate the proper functioning of the system and would end up counterproductive. In line with this, about a handful of empirical evidences uncovered issues pertaining to the practices of ECCE leadership.

When it comes to research, published qualitative studies on the leadership of ECCE conducted in Ethiopia seems insufficiently available. Specifically, so far, no studies have been conducted on how ECCE leaders are assigned, the leadership behavior of ECCE leaders, the extent to which organizational citizenship behavior has been practiced in ECCE centers, and on the employment of pedagogical leadership as attempted in this research.

In Ethiopia, a good number of studies that have been conducted in the area of ECCE (e.g., Adam, 2020; Addisu & Wudu, 2019; Astatke & Kassaw, 2017; Lemma, 2014a; Mulugeta, 2015; Negussie & Slater, 2018; Tefera, 2018; Teferra et al., 2011; Woldehanna & Gebremedhin, 2012; Yadeta, 2016; Yizengaw & Tessega, 2020) highlighted the appropriateness of ECCE for children under eight. If programs that offer ECCE have a purpose to determine the life chances of children, the availability of effective management, which religiously puts the child at the center of any activity is not a choice. In other words, the schooling of ECCE remains productive if it is backed with a responsible leadership system such as creating a playful learning environment. However, the leadership behavior, practices, and challenges of ECCE in the context of Ethiopian culture and values is not yet sufficiently embarked on.

In the country, as it was already stated, there is a paucity of studies done on ECCE in general and on the ECCE leadership in particular. Simply put, there are quite few national studies that deal with leadership in ECCE exclusively; instead, some studies (e.g., Addisu & Wudu, 2019; Eshetu, 2015; Megersa, 2015; Tefera & Hagos, 2016; Tigistu, 2013; Woldehanna, 2011; Zewdie & Tefera, 2015) attempted to address the problem of the sector. With the exception of Megersa (2015), who studies the management of KG schools, none of these published studies, however, embarked on either management or leadership in ECCE. For example, Eshetu's (2015) quantitative work found that students with pre-school experience scored better results than students without the experience.

Likewise, Woldehanna and Gebremedhin's (2012) study found that preschool attendance has a statistically significant impact on the cognitive development of children.

Cognizant of the research gap, this dissertation hopes to inform policymakers, researchers, and practitioner's the leadership behavior, practices, and challenges using qualitative research approach since others have not yet sufficiently dwelt on. In brief, the pitfalls of the program regarding the below-mentioned concerns of the ECCE leadership appear a yawning gap to be filled. Therefore, the study is guided by the following basic questions.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

In line with the purpose of the study explained above, the following five specific research questions attempted to answer the overarching research question of the study.

1. How do early childhood care and education leaders engage in the practices of preschools and O-classes in Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa city administration?
2. What leadership behavior is commonly exhibited in preschools and O-classes?
3. To what extent do the early childhood care and education leaders cultivate early childhood teachers' organizational citizenship behavior?
4. How is pedagogical leadership employed in preschools and O-class centers?
5. What challenges do early childhood care and education leaders face in effectively operating preschools and O-classes?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this research is to explore the leadership of private preschools and government O- Class centers in Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa city administration with special reference to the leadership assignment, behavior, OCB, pedagogy, and its challenges. In light of the major research question, the specific objectives of the study include to:

1. Explore how ECCE leaders engage in the practices of private preschools and government O- Class centers?
2. Identify the leadership behavior that is commonly exhibited in private preschools and government O- Class centers?
3. Assess the extent to which the private preschools and government O- Class center leaders cultivate early childhood teachers' organizational citizenship behavior?
4. Examine how pedagogical leadership is employed in private preschools and government O- Class centers?
5. Investigate challenges that affect the operation of private preschools and government O- Class center leaders?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The result of this study is hoped to have significances to different bodies including researchers, policymakers, and practitioners' as briefly discussed below.

In Ethiopia, although the development of modern ECCE began in 1900 there is a paucity of research conducted in the field. Particularly, studies carried out on the leadership of ECCE are found in a desperate position. Therefore, the study is believed to serve ECCE and educational leadership researchers in giving preliminary information on the leadership of ECCE in Ethiopia. Besides, the study might increase the awareness, insights, and enthusiasm of other researchers to conduct studies on ECCE in Ethiopia and elsewhere in the world.

I hope that the findings of this study could provide valuable insights to policymakers interested in the leadership of ECCE. In specific terms, the study might instigate policy people to avert the worries of the sector in general and the situation of leadership in particular. Not suffice it to say, informed by the findings of the present study policymakers could draw a lesson and perhaps could be committed to improving the lives of millions of marginalized children of the age group.

This study could improve the current practices of the ECCE program. Primarily, the frontline fighters, the ECCE leaders could improve their leadership expertise. Next, a rewarding relationship and interaction, which might be drawn out of the presence of effective leadership, could be created between and among all parties who have been involved in the process. Besides, in the due course, the possibly observed practical leadership gaps might catch the eyes of woreda, zone, region, and ministerial-level officials so that paves the way for further development opportunities (training or and education) to the ECCE center leaders. Eventually, due to the contribution of this study, all children who are admitted to the program might receive sufficient care and education, in relative terms.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The study included issues pertaining to leadership in the ECCE program. Mainly due to the purpose of this study and matters related to manageability, the leadership of ECCE has been focused on the existing practices and challenges of the sector. This is because I believe that among other things, leaders assignment, leaders behavior, how leaders cultivate their companion teachers OCB, the way leaders have distributed tasks over these people, the practices of pedagogical leadership, and ECCE leaders operational challenges have been considered. This is because in the process of leading ECCE centers the aforementioned issues are assumed to play an indispensable role in simplifying or complicating the realization of its mission.

With this understanding in mind, the present study is delimited to the leadership of ECCE. Leadership in the ECCE sector could be analyzed at least at three tiers: first-line (lower), middle, and higher up (top) levels. This study looks into the lower unit or echelon (the ECCE center) of the sector. The reason is that compared to other levels the ECCE center is the basic unit where the

actual care and education have been going on. Moreover, the study is believed to contribute to the improvement of the practical situation of the sector.

In terms of the geographic boundary, the study is confined to two regions (Oromia Regional State and Addis Ababa City Administration) in Ethiopia. More specifically, Addis Ababa City Administration and Oromia Regional State are selected based on the following parameters. First, compared to other regions, they are among the first top four regions in terms of 4-6 years age enrolled child population with 3,014,441 and 179,004 child populations in 2015/16 respectively (Ministry of Education, 2017). Second, there is a considerable variation between the two regions in terms of Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratios (NER). Hence, in GER, Addis Ababa is the highest (94%), whereas Oromia is the lowest (38.4%). Likewise, the NER of Addis Ababa is the highest (79.5%), and Oromia's NER, is the lowest with (37%) (Ministry of Education, 2017). Third, compared to Oromia and other regional states Addis Ababa has a long time of experience in delivering the ECCE program. Fourth, in Addis Ababa, the private and non-private institutions seem evenly positioned across the sub-cities. Additionally, data accessibility, familiarity with the language and culture of the locations, and manageability were considered in delimiting the sites.

### **1.7 Definition of Key Terms**

- **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):** ECCE embodies all kinds of formal and informal services to children from conception to age 8. There are a variety of services in this span. Prenatal care and parent education, daycare for infants from 6 months to 3 to 4 years, preschools or KG for children from 3 to 6 years, and a variety of school readiness programs in Ethiopia: O-classes (a one year school readiness program attached to government primary schools, child-to-child initiative a non-formal one year school readiness program in which

older children are trained to mentor young children in their villages to read, write, play etc. A more familiar cultural school readiness programs also include priest schools and qur'anic schools (madrassas). The focus of this study is on private preschools and government O-classes.

- **Leadership:** Though the concept of leadership seems ambiguous, authorities clarified from different angles and consumed it differently. Hence, in this study the following definitions may help conceptualize what it is: leadership is a socially constructed, situational, and interpretive phenomenon. It is the ability to enlist, mobilize, and motivate others to apply their abilities and resources to a given cause; leadership is a function of the whole situation (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004). Leadership is the ability of a person in motivating others to collaborate and implement activities willingly to achieve their organizational objectives; it is the process of influencing the group under appropriate situations (Sanguanwongwan, 2003). Put it another way, though, thousands of definitions have been drawn to articulate what leadership is, Yukl (2014) advised that in research, a context or purpose-specific definition of the following sort seems to suffice to meet the purpose of the present study for instance. Hence, in this context leadership is defined as, “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2014, p.7).
- **Leadership Behavior:** Refers to the behaviors or the leadership attributes that are manifested to realize organizational objectives. It is an emotional commitment to the mission of the unit; yet it is a behavior that could vary based on the given situation. Leadership behavior is dominantly characterized by its task, relationship, and change orientations (Yukl, 2014).

- **Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB):** OCB refers to all helping behaviors extended to colleagues, supervisors, and students, such as lending a colleague a hand with work overload or preparing special assignments for higher and lower level students; and extended to the school at large, such as suggesting improvements in pedagogical issues or talking favorably about the school to outsiders. OCB shares a close conceptual kinship with the idea of collective responsibility and refers to teachers' responsibility for student learning (Somech & Ron, 2007).
- **O-Class:** "O"-class refers to a formalized preprimary education attached to primary schools. 'O' class is a one year program in the Ethiopian early childhood education system which is annexed to primary schools where children enrolled at age 6 and stay for a year till they join primary schools (Ministry of Education, 2015). Currently, "O"-classes has been representing *preschools, Early Childhood Care and Education institutions, and kindergartens owned by the Government*. It is believed that the center extends its services on the cognitive and socio-emotional development for children of the appropriate age (4 to 6 years old). The "0"-class (Zero-class) was abandoned not to represent the practices of preprimary education as it connotes a negative meaning (Oromia Education Bureau, 2018).
- **Pedagogical Leadership:** In this study, pedagogical leadership refers to a series of acts including setting and monitoring teaching goals and motivating others; creating and maintaining of supportive atmosphere of trust; facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, beliefs or skills of the learner; providing feedback to teachers, ensuring a high-quality teaching and learning, providing appropriate resources, supervising the teaching program. In effect, it is the leadership for learning and about creating and developing a positive relationship among teachers, parents, children, and the community in systematic and focused ways (Male & Palaiologou, 2017; Peng & Vařátková, 2016).

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Four bodies of literature inform this review: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), leadership in ECCE, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and pedagogical leadership. Key theoretical concepts revolving around ECCE leadership including care and education, benefits of ECCE, and historical accounts of ECCE have also been reviewed. On a more general level, notions related to leadership, ECCE, pedagogy, and active learning pedagogy have been discussed. Most importantly, I have consulted pertinent empirical studies to draw the subsequent literature. In brief, the review provides a glimpse of knowledge and understanding to address the problem of leadership in the ECCE sector in Ethiopia.

#### **2.1 Early Childhood Care and Education: Meaning and Nature**

In this study, the term Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is used to cover institutions that provide care and education to children aged at least 3 years (Zhu, 2009). The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) designed by UNESCO also defines it as ECCE education, pre-primary education, and ISCED level 0, as comprising programs that offer structured, purposeful learning activities in a preschool or a center (UNESCO, 2005). ECCE is an organized and sustained center-based childhood care and education-taking place before compulsory schooling and can be offered in different settings such as nurseries, crèches, childcare centers, daycare centers, kindergartens, preschools, and other similar institutions (Gashaw, 2014). It is also a place where the child learns to learn. It is a form of education in which children are taught through creative play, social interaction, and natural expression (Haque et al., 2013).

Despite having similar meanings, ECCE is designated by different names. The term early childhood education and care (ECCE) was “originally adopted by OECD, and has recently been adopted by the European Union” (Moss, 2012, p.492). Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

is, however, the term used by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). United Nations Educational and Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) refer to early childhood care and education (ECCE). United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) calls it early childhood development (ECD). Besides, the World Bank calls it early child development (ECD) (Gashaw, 2014).

In spite of the use of these various terms, the term *early childhood care and education* (ECCE), which was originally conceived by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2006) refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain and support the holistic development of children, from birth to eight years (Couse & Chen, 2010). It has a strong and positive impact on further learning during the primary level and beyond (Ministry of Education, 2011). In the words of Moss, "It encompasses formal services for children between birth and compulsory school age focused on providing early or preschool education and childcare for working parents; as discussed later, the distinction between education and childcare remains in many countries, though its validity is increasingly questioned" (Moss, 2012, p.492). Moss (2006) also added that both for economic competition and the amelioration of its associated social disorders ECCE services appear as the necessary condition.

### ***2.1.1 Care and Education in ECCE***

A recent study by Shami, Ahmad, and Khyzer's (2014) noted that both care and education are regarded as the basic needs of children. Like education, care remains the state and the parents' responsibility. In this context, care is one of the services to be provided from the caregiver or service provider to the children in ECCE centers. This suggests that, it coincides with the idea of Greenleaf (1977, 1978), service to followers. It is the process of treating children with respect and consideration, rather than as pawns on a chessboard (Gabriel, 2015). Still, it is worth noting that, it is not merely limited to respecting and consideration; it also encapsulates a constant watchfulness

over changing emotional and physical needs and aspirations of children over a while (Garcia, Pence, & Evans, 2008) by parents, teachers, and school leaders. Empathy, recognition, altruistic orientation, and taking responsibilities for others, and being prepared to take personal risks in discharging responsibilities, argues Gabriel, are among the archetypes of the caring leader (Gabriel, 2015). Hence, in discharging their roles and responsibilities not only ECCE leaders but also teachers should go beyond the call of the duty.

Paraphrasing Moore (1992) Kroth and Keeler (2009) elaborates on what care is. Originally, the term care comes from Latin 'cura', meaning cure of the soul, determination, attention, and healing. For Moore care is, "a sense of ongoing attention" (Kroth & Keeler, 2009, p.507). It is the capability and practice of living for others beyond feeling. Moore further explained it as a willingness to alleviate suffering, and requires attention, art, craft (techne-skill). Care means, "committing energies for the other person and doing that from a position of equality" (Kroth & Keeler, 2009, p.508). Caring is about maintaining the right balance between caring too little, or too much (professional over-attachment or under-attachment)-(Kroth & Keeler, 2009). Care goes beyond feeling, it begins with feeling concern, recognizing that another's presence matters, and then dedication to, and ultimately willing to suffer for, another (Gabriel, 2015).

Gabriel (2015) added that caring for another person is an individualized form of work- it relies on face-to-face interaction; for this reason, it resists bureaucratization and formalization. Caring evokes complex emotions in both the caregiver and the cared for; these include positive and negative emotions, such as love, gratitude, envy, fear, anxiety, and are liable to entail ambivalence (Gabriel, 2015). In the same way, Tronto (1993) describes care as a practical activity which "we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (p.103). This denotes that caring and being cared for are among the key components of ECCE.

By way of conceptualizing care and education seem to have contending meaning.

In practice, care and education seem almost the same. Providing a clear boundary between the two concepts, viz., care, and education could not be an easy job. For example, a review by Smith et al. (2000) failed to indicate care is not education. Gibbons (2007) also suggested that in the context of ECCE care is education. Furthermore, Moss (2006) underscores the relationship between care and education. For Moss, care, learning, upbringing, and pedagogy appear to be the interconnected and indivisible facets of life.

However, paraphrasing Smith et al. (2000, p. 7) Gibbons (2007) attempted to find a dividing line in that care refers to “nurturing,” while education refers to “planned and an organized endeavor designed to develop children’s learning” (p.125). In this context, there could be negligible distinctions between care and education. It appears caring as an inferior activity to education. To illustrate, in affluent countries such as Scandinavian countries and Aotearoa/New Zealand the differences are being refitted by discourses of education (Gibbons, 2007). Nevertheless, Moss (2006) has a firm stand in opposing the situation. He emphasized that the distinctions between education and care would not be distinctions at all. He added that the fault line, between care and education, has been bridged.

It could be argued that care and education are regarded as inseparable social constructions. Put it another way, care and education are both techniques of social practice. If the component and practice of care is missed or dwindled, education, specifically schooling, protects the child from the world, and the world from the child. Therefore, in ECCE discourse it is important to re-weave what it means to care and educate.

In brief, care is the practice of helping a child to grow. It is not only having concern or compassion for someone but the act of recognizing the natural talents and capabilities of a child. It is not the process of dominating the other; rather, it is the consistent and sheer determination of the caregiver to scaffold the child so that develop holistically. It could be argued that like nursing,

teaching is a caring profession. That implies the need for ECCE leaders, teachers, and parents to offer a proper attachment for children who are under their auspices. If the caregivers discharge their responsibilities and refuse to harden, their hearts the caretakers could find meaning in their lives. The caregivers in turn, also grow in that process and feel better because of the worth perceived in the other. What's more, a teacher with a caring orientation to work and others signifies the attribute of being a valued and valuable person quality. Concisely, Noddings's (2005) summarizes the idea of caring as, the "bedrock of all successful education" (p. 27).

**2.1.1.1 The Status of Care and Education in ECCE.** Despite the need to give appropriate childcare, several studies (e.g., Gabriel, 2015; Tronto, 1993) show that proper childcare is not provided in different societies. A study by Gabriel (2015) reveals that across the board caring activities are devalued, underpaid. This is particularly true among marginalized and underprivileged groups including female children (e.g., Tronto, 1993). In the same vein, Llyod (2006) noted that care work (such as jobs at ECCE centers) is heavily gendered and overlooked. In spite of the considerable "aptitudes, talents, and increased currency it demands, it is widely viewed as low skill and low cost" (Lloyd, 2006, p.324).

A recent study by McKnight (2017) argues that ECCE workers have a low status in some people's eyes. The lower position attached to the ECCE teachers is associated with the historical dichotomy between the concepts of care and education. The dichotomy imposes the view that those who can take care of children require fewer qualifications or less valued and less visible than teachers in the higher levels. The problem is, the inferior social positioning historical view of the ECCE persists. Regardless of this, Moss (2006) argued that ECCE employees need to have better qualifications and superior skills to properly deliver the service it demands. Moss also indicated that "many countries, especially those who have neglected the issue over the years assuming that a

female workforce with relatively low levels of training and pay was sufficient and sustainable” (Moss, 2006, p. 39), has admitted improving the situation.

On the other hand, Curtis and O'Hagan (2003) noted that these days, Governments of the world and international organizations (e.g., UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank), “are stressing the importance of providing quality early childhood education and care to all children, not only those from less disadvantaged backgrounds” (p.v). In connection with this, as Shami et al.(2014) noted that in this century, to position the country what matters is not the count of the natural resources such as the oil reserves but the amount of human capital development. This means that education in general and ECCE, in particular, could play a key role in the socio-economic development of a nation. Thus, creating a conducive learning environment for children in ECCEs together with the improvement of adults working conditions who work in these institutions yields a positive outcome.

### ***2.1.2 Historical Accounts of Early Childhood Care and Education***

**2.1.2.1 Early Childhood Care and Education in the World.** The history of ECCE could serve as a lens through which one could see the previous undertakings, the current phenomenon, and the road to the future shape of ECCE. Moose (2012) argued “analyses of the past are good foundations for foretelling the future” (p.461). The genesis of formal education in general and ECCE in particular has been rooted in the fundamental concepts of ‘nature vs. nurture’ constructs. To conceptualize what ECCE is and where it comes from, it is worth noting to look at multiple perspectives viewed via different lenses. Hence, the historical account dwells on how modern childcare and education come to alive and understood through history. Gordon and Browne (2013) reveal two major periods: pre-modern childhood (before 1700) and modern childhood (after 1700) to clarify the pattern of the undertakings.

Before 1700, Western society showed little concern for children and education (Curtis & O'Hagan, 2003; Gordon & Browne, 2013). For instance, in ancient Greece and Rome people like Plato and Aristotle founded schools to improve wealthy boys thinking skills, governance, and military strategies. Except for girls, schooling was provided for the six or seven year's boys of the royal family. In contrast, by the 1500s, Martin Luther, who advocated, *education for all*, initiated parents to send their children to schools, including girls and the poor.

After 1700, the Western community and a number of pedagogues showed better concern for children and education (Gordon & Browne, 2013). Gordon and Browne (2013) further noted the substantial contributions made by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Dickens to the ECCE programs. For example, Rousseau advocated "children should have a flexible and less restrained school atmosphere" (Gordon & Browne, 2013, p.11). He recommended the use of concrete teaching materials for children below seven. Pestalozzi puts the idea of care and education and the need to have an integrated curriculum, which would develop the whole child. He wanted education to be of the hand, the head, and the heart of the child. Froebel coined the German term-kindergarten, where *kinder* means children, and *garten*, means garden, or - children's garden in 1837 in Germany. At the turn of the century, Montessori introduced methods of working with slum children and children with mental defects. She convinced the world that with proper motivation and a conducive learning environment they can learn successfully. Dickens shares her latter idea, which highlighted the poor social conditions affect the overall development of children and the importance of education.

As a whole, most of these individuals were crusaders for education often emphasize the importance of childhood. Also, they tend to offer insights that changed our ways of educating children and how we transmit our values to the next generation. In this sense, the aforementioned early childhood educators are both historians and policymakers. Specifically, they enable us to

better understand ECCE and help consider how events, developments, and ideas can rhyme, or chime, or echo over time. In sum, from the point of the history of education, they have made tremendous contributions to education in general and ECCE in particular.

**2.1.2.2 Early Childhood Care and Education in Ethiopia.** Hoot et al.'s (2004) study chronicled that the Ethiopian education system in general and the ECCE, in particular, is the product of traditional and Western education systems. ECCE began in this country at the instigation of people who were concerned about the plight of children in the country (e.g., the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Ethiopian philosopher Zer'a Ya'aqob and in the outset of the 20th century Emperor Menelik II) (Tefera & Hagos, 2016). Put it another way, in Ethiopia, the significance of ECCE was acknowledged as early as Medieval Ethiopia. During this time, male children start attending the Ethiopian Orthodox Church education at around age 4 (Tigistu, 2013). The curriculum for children of this age consisted primarily of drill and practice of the alphabet. Learning by heart was the common approach to master the alphabet, to read and recite religious texts including the Psalms of David (Hoot et al., 2004). The intention seems to produce religious leaders and an educated populace who serve the likely secular bureaucracy of the time (e.g., to train translators) (Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012).

Specifically, after the turn of the twentieth century, changes have been observed in the formal education of young children. Menelik II (1889-1913), recognized that greatly improved education would be needed for a modern Ethiopia. Following his inspirations, the first kindergarten was established in 1900 in Dire Dawa for the French railway workers (Tigistu, 2013). After that, during the Derg regime, an independent institution “ the Ethiopian Children’s Commission” with the task of caring and educating Ethiopian children was established in 1981 (Assefa, 2014). Following the establishment of the Commission ECCE became part of the country’s education policy (Zeray, 2011). Besides, in the late 1970s, one of the landmark contributions of the regime, a

vigorous National Literacy Campaign moved the practices of ECCE from the capital city to the rural-urban sites (Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012). Hence, the number of preschools meaningfully rose in number from 77 to 912 and this is coupled with the growth of its enrollment size 7573 to 102,000 from 1975 to 1990 for example (Hoot et al., 2004).

On the other hand, though ECCE centers meaningfully rose in number the program has been overwhelmed by fee-charging private ECCEs mainly targeted children of the middle and upper class parents living in urban and semi-urban areas of the country (Woldehanna, 2011). Yet, the sector has filled the vacuum of demand to benefit the advantaged urban groups. Recent studies (e.g., Woldehanna, 2016; Woldehanna & Gebremedhin, 2012) conducted on ECCE also argued that except in some technical support, the Government of Ethiopia has limited public investment in preschool education. As a result, the inequality that exists between urban and rural areas (and between rich and poor) may be exacerbated. In connection with this, Negash's (1996) argument that says, thorough out history, Ethiopia's education including early childhood education has been an urban phenomenon makes sense. In sum, it could be argued that for much of the 20th century, in Ethiopia, "access to education was scant, and if it existed, it was skewed and unequal in favor of urban and affluent families" (Woldehanna & Araya, 2016, p.7).

The Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1994 indicated, "Kindergarten will focus on the all-round development of the child in preparation for formal schooling" (TGE, 1994, p.14). In doing so, the government recognizes the pre-primary phase of education for children aged 4–6 years. Besides, in 2010, the phenomenal comprehensive National ECCE Policy Framework (NECCEPF) came to being (Ministry of Education, 2010). The policy was endorsed and signed by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and the then Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs. However, active engagement on the promises made for ECCE, for example, in

Dakar Goal 1 on expanding and improving comprehensive ECCE; particularly for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children appear questionable (Woldehanna & Gebremedhin, 2012).

Since, the NECCEPF and its Implementation Strategic Plan came to effect new initiatives such as O-class (School Readiness Program), Child to Child, and Accelerated Learning Readiness programs have been functioning. All these programs have been undertaken by the Government and Non-Government Organizations (e.g., UNICEF) to improve the practices or access of the ECCE sector. These actions have considerably increased the ECCE enrollment rate from 5.3% in 2011/12 to 40.7% in 2018/19 (Ministry of Education, 2018). The expansion of the ECCE programs was also believed to raise awareness and public interest in the program to send their children to the nearby Government primary schools or preschools for instance.

However, the expansion rate of the subsector is undersized. For example, the latest Education Statistics Annual Abstract of the Ministry of Education of 2018/19 depicted that the net enrolment ratio of children aged between 4-6 attend an ECCE program is under half (40.7%) of the total child population. This signals that 59.3% of the total population of age 4-6, i.e. nearly 4.6 million children, did not get the opportunity to attend preprimary education in 2018/19 (Ministry of Education, 2018). Of the three types available modalities of preprimary education, 81% of the children enrolled in ECCE attend “O”-classes.

Overall, when we look back about the development of ECCE in Ethiopia, a slow and sporadic change has been observed. The ECCE policy that appeared to change the shape and status of ECCE seem almost beyond recognition. However, the education system in general and the ECCE in particular for being Western and unable to respond to the Ethiopians context and interest seem to perpetuate. Briefly, in spite of the fact that the issue of ECCE has not been given the concern and attention it ought to have by responsible authorities, the present study is among efforts to uncover the previously mentioned gaps.

### ***2.1.3 Benefits of Early Childhood Care and Education***

Early Childhood Care and Education benefit children in a host of ways. Numerous studies (e.g., Berlinski et al., 2009; Bennett, 2011; Brock, 2012; Croft, 2017; Heckman, 2011; Vandembroeck, Roets, & Roose, 2012) have indicated that ECCE has substantial benefits to the overall development of the child below eight. Barnett and Yarosz (2004) argue that the period of early childhood is inherently critical and it has a persistent impact on the life spans of the child in school performance, school retention, adult earning, even less likely to engage in criminal behavior, and delinquency. A World Bank report (2007) indicates that a healthy cognitive and emotional development in the early years translates into tangible economic returns, social benefits, and mental development.

**2.1.3.1 Economic Benefits.** Classical economists such as Adam Smith, Denison, Heckman, Schultz, and Psacharopoulos, are on the same page in stressing that investing in education in general and ECCE, in particular, appears a wise and profitable investment compared to other forms of investment (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1993). Scholars (e.g., Engle et al. 2011; Heckman, 2011; Rossiter, 2016) have proven that investing in early childhood development brings a substantial amount of economic gains. A recent study by Karoly (2016) also indicated that for every single dollar invested in ECCE expecting a return of 3-4 dollars appears a wise expectation. In the same fashion, Children's Early Care and Education in Ireland's report of 2010 revealed that compared to later childhood programs a dollar spent for early childhood programs has a return of eight times greater than the amount invested in the program. In connection with this, Fullan (2013) noted "careful attention to the early years will pay off economically at least seven times the investment, not to mention the myriad benefits for individuals and society that will accrue" (p. 27).

**2.1.3.2 Social Benefits.** A commissioned study by Adamson (2008) compared ten ECCE standards in 25 OECD countries. The study revealed that pre-primary education is found to have

significant individual and social returns (Adamson, 2008). An empirical study by Vandembroeck et al. (2012) noted that ECCE reduces the social inequalities that might be created between the rich and the poor. Vandembroeck et al. added that access to some form of ECCE might also solve key social problems such as unemployment, poverty, school failure, and crime. Compared with remedial services later in life, the World Bank writes early intervention yields higher returns as a preventive measure (World Bank, 2007). In connection with this, paraphrasing Heckman and Masterov (2007), Woldehanna (2011) noted “skill begets skill; learning begets learning. Early disadvantage, if left untreated, leads to academic and social difficulties in later years. Advantages accumulate; so does disadvantage” (p.6).

**2.1.3.3 Cognitive and Emotional Development.** Early Childhood Care and Education provide an immense contribution for the development of the cognitive (language, literacy, and math skills) and non-cognitive (perseverance, motivation, emotional, social, and physical) competencies of children (Barnett & Yarosz, 2004; Berlinski, Galiani, & Gertler, 2009). To demonstrate, in the science of neurology and brain development, researchers reported that attending ECCE centers generated a positive result. ECCE is a productive instrument to reap both the short-term and long-term rewards of life (Berlinski et al., 2009).

The program not only helps prepare children for entry into Grade 1 but also provides a foundation for later success (Haque et al., 2013). A positive school culture, good leadership, a positive learning environment, high expectations, and good quality teaching (Sammons, et al., 2008) could lead a child to succeed in all walks of life. Besides, ECCE programs set the foundation for better performance later in life by improving not only children’s cognitive skills but also their non-cognitive skills such as perseverance and motivation (Schumer, 2007). Essentially, Hayes’s (2006) study summarized “the importance of the early years to children’s lives is now beyond question” (p. iii).

Hence, there is no exaggeration if one can say ECCE is the crux of life matters. It enabled children to be the “captains of their destiny rather than prisoners of their fate” (Yukl, 2014, p.45). Given all these benefits compared to other sub-sectors of education in Africa, including Ethiopia ECCE remains in an embryonic state and unequally treated (Teferra et al., 2001). In contrast, Woldehanna’s (2016) recent study conducted in Ethiopia revealed that many developing countries underemphasized the investment of ECCE. Similarly, a shred of empirical evidence by (Berlinski et al., 2009) showed that though, ECCE is targeted to improve the life condition of disadvantaged children, little is known about the benefits that it accrues to the population as a whole. Therefore, it could be fair to argue that if ECCE is properly led and children remain in the center of the interplay most likely an honest, fair, dependable, and rational generation is likely built.

In conclusion, from the previously mentioned insights, one can summarize that children who participate in high-quality ECCEs are more likely to enjoy successful life than their peers who are limited from. They are also better able to balance their wants and needs against those of others and make positive contributions to society. The likely opportunity to graduate from high school and tertiary education institutions appear higher. Contrary to that, if children do not learn proper values and behavior when they are very young, problems can grow. These problems can flourish with serious consequences, as children grow older. For example, most likely, they drop out of school, use drugs, engage in criminal activity or pursue other risky behaviors like teenage pregnancy, smoking, and the list goes on. In short, children who grow up with robust, positive values are happier and do better in and out of schools. In brief, it is worth noting that for the care and education of this group of people their caregivers such as the family, teachers, and the ECCE center leadership appear to play an indispensable role.

## 2.2 Leadership Defined

Several scholars in the field (e.g., Adair, 2015; Daft, 2014; Mannix, et al., 2013; Northouse, 2018; Williams, 2003; Yukl, 2014) provided a plethora of leadership definitions. Interestingly, the ageless topic, which at least shown in academic discourses since the time of Plato (428-C. 348 BC) lacks a standard definition and is poorly understood (Milliken, 1998; Yukl, 2014). Duursema (2013) agreed that leadership is “a topic that most people hear and talk about, but the least understood notion on earth” (p.15). Also, Bennis (1989) argued “leadership is like beauty, it’s hard to define, but you know it when you see it” (p.6). For Yukl (2014), the nature of leadership: characteristics of the leader (traits, values, confidence, expertise, behavior, influence tactics, mental models, attributes, patterns of interaction, and so forth), followers characteristics (e.g., cooperation, mutual trust, task commitment, job satisfaction, skills, attributions about leaders, willingness, capability, OCB, etc.), and aspects of the situation (type and size of the organizational unit, position power, task structure and complexity, organizational culture, environmental uncertainty and change, external dependencies and constraints, national cultural values) might make it hard to easily grasp what leadership is. Yet, theories of leadership, which are associated with nature (trait), nurture (behavior), and contingent (situation), open the room for scholarly nit-pickings.

Though the concept of leadership seems ambiguous, authorities clarified from different angles and consumed it differently. Hence, the following definitions may help conceptualize what it is: leadership is the ability to enlist, mobilize, and motivate others to apply their abilities and resources to a given cause; leadership is a function of the whole situation (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004). Studies (e.g., Fiedler, 1964; Jenkins, 1947; Mann, 1959, & Stogdill, 1948 cited in Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004) unanimously concluded that persons who are leaders in one situation might not necessarily be leaders in other situations. Leadership is the ability of a person in motivating others to collaborate and implement activities willingly to achieve their organizational

objectives; it is the process of influencing the group under appropriate situations (Sanguanwongwan, 2003). Gardner defines leadership as “the process of persuasion or example by which an individual or team induces a group to act” (Baker, 2014, p.356).

Put it another way, though, thousands of definitions have been drawn to articulate what leadership is, Yukl (2014) advised that in research, a context or purpose-specific definition of the following sort seems to suffice to meet the purpose of the present study for instance. Hence, in this context leadership is defined as, “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2014, p.7).

Leadership, from the point of OCB, can also ingeniously defined as extra-role behaviors. Some authors (e.g., Krishnan & Arora, 2008) maintain that leadership does not occur when a superior cannot motivate subordinates to perform voluntarily above the minimum requirements of their work roles. The majority of the aforementioned definitions of leadership resides in what leaders think and demonstrate. Leaders must be skilled at the process of crafting a shared vision and making others visualize it; otherwise, as it has been said it remains “hallucination” (Baker, 2014, p.356). Successful leaders also blend the core leadership attributes such as drive, trust, tolerance, gratitude, humility, caring, interpersonal relations, and skills of the organization. In other words, they care about others, first, for who they are and, second, for what they can do. In brief, exemplary leaders regard others first as “human beings”, rather than as “human doings” (Baker, 2014, p. 357).

Kirkpatrick and Locke’s (1991) next remarks are more telling. Whether leaders are born or made they do not have to be great people by being intelligent or omniscient prophets to succeed. Leaders need to have the right stuff. Leadership is a demanding job with substantial pressures and grave responsibilities. They could be ordinary people who happened to be in the right place at the

right time. Perhaps the place matters, but it takes a special kind of person to master the challenges of the situation. In other words, in the realm of leadership, the individual does matter (in fact, in every other realm).

In its practical sense, leadership plays an invaluable role in creating and strengthening the OCB of an educational institution, for instance. Various researchers (e.g., Kellett et al., 2002) have also linked the ECCE center's effectiveness with effective leadership. They argue that, in the absence of effective leadership, goal accomplishment and ECCE center effectiveness could be merely achieved. Hence, in the ECCE settings to have effective practices of care and education, the role of ECCE center leadership appears indispensable. Yet, there is a small but growing body of literature suggesting that our perception of someone as a leader, could be affected by his/her leadership behavior (Kellett et al., 2002).

### **2.3 Leadership Behavior**

Theories regarding leadership behavior have been evolved through centuries. The contentious and persistent 'nature/nurture' discourse, 'is a leader born, made, or both' assisted the development of the concept. Due to this fact, one cannot find a static theory of the matter; and indeed, by its very nature, it appears fluid. Likewise, by its very nature, the ECCE environment is of the same pattern (Rodd, 2012). Studying ECCE from the point of leadership requires understanding the existing leadership behaviors. Hence, of the many theories, in the research of this sort, the most commonly encountered approaches of leadership include trait approach (the great man theory-the granddaddy of leadership concepts), behavior approach, and situational or contingency approaches of leadership (Daft, 2014; Fox, 2012; Yukl, 2014; Zeleke, 2013). This review describes the first three theories of leadership. Originally, the first two theories considered the individual leader because it was believed that leadership was inherent (Trait) and or learned

(Behavioral). Next, the third, the situational theory was considered as an important factor in studying leadership in ECCE (Fox, 2012).

Trait approaches of leadership attributed leaders' success to their inherited qualities. Some of the innate characteristics include energy, intelligence, self-confidence, personal integrity, drive for responsibility, initiative, independence, tolerance for stress, irresistible persuasive power, uncanny foresight, honesty, trustworthiness, and so forth. It was believed that leaders are born and not made. They are extraordinary people who are endowed with special abilities and talents not possessed by others. However, from the outset of the 1920s, hundreds of trait studies did not support and find any traits that would distinguish them from non-leaders and guarantee success (Daft, 2014; Yukl, 2014). Despite these criticisms, paraphrasing Stogdill's 1948 findings Daft (2014) noted “a review of more than 160 trait studies conducted between 1947 to 1970 concluded “some personal traits seem to contribute to effective leadership” (Daft, 2014, p35). Hence, based on Daft’s (2014) idea I argue that depending on the situation some traits such as intelligence, self-confidence, personal integrity, initiative, interpersonal skills, and drive for responsibility appeared useful for successful ECCE leadership.

In the early 1950s, the behavioral approach came to the fore because of researchers failure to discover a universal set of leadership traits that make leaders effective (Yukl, 2014). Consequently, researchers began looking at what leaders do on the job, rather than examining the traits of the leader. As a result, over the past 50 years, several studies conducted on leadership behavior have sought to uncover the behaviors that successful leaders exhibit. For example, Yukl (2014) and many more (e.g., Daft, 2014; McKnight, 2017) indicated that how leaders behave (the use of a leader's practical skills such as technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills) provides useful insights into the subject. Following the introduction of the approach, a number of studies have been conducted on the leadership behavior of organizational leaders. To illustrate, the

University of Iowa came up with autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership behaviors; whereas, the University of Michigan uncovered the two broad classifications of leadership behaviors (the people-oriented and the task-oriented) (Daft, 2014; Northhouse, 2018).

As can be understood, in the studies mentioned above the essence of the theory implies that at ECCE centers leaders go for both employee-oriented and result-oriented approaches. However, to be effective the extent of ECCE leaders' engagement remains elusive. As a lesson to be drawn, the approaches failed to consider the effects of the contextual factors on leadership (Yukl, 2014). In addition, like trait theory, the behavioral theory was not immune from scholars' critic because some aspects of the situation may call for contingent leadership behavior (Fox, 2012). Hence, over time, to encompass the situation new perspective have surfaced (Fox, 2012).

In the 1970s, the failure to find a universal style of leader traits and behaviors that could be effective to determine a leader's success in almost every situation forced researchers to propose situational theories of leadership. Hersey and Blanchard (1969) developed the theory based on Reddin's (1967) 3-D management style theory. Since its inception, the theory has been refined and revised several times (Fox, 2012; Northhouse, 2018). The underlying principle of the theory upholds that the success of a leader is a combination of a leader's traits, leader's behavior, and contextual factors. Essentially, I argue that the situational approach is based on the assumption that effective leadership cannot be explained by any one factor. The premise of the theory states that effective leadership depends on the situation. This is because different situations demand different kinds of leadership. For instance, the leadership behavior that could be exhibited at the ECCE center might not be the same with higher learning institutions. Yukl (2014) strengthened the notion by arguing that leadership effectiveness is the result of the three variables: (1) characteristics of leaders, (2) characteristics of followers, and (3) characteristics of the situation. To avoid derailed

leadership different situations requires different leadership styles. Therefore, an ECCE leader has to adapt to his/her specific behavior to fit the situation.

In connection with this, the most notable situational theorist, Hersey and Blanchard (1969) argued that leaders should adapt their behavior to fit their followers' characteristics. The point of Hersey and Blanchard's theory is that employees vary in their maturity levels. In the words of Hersey and Blanchard (1988) situational leadership is founded on an interplay between (a) the extent of guidance and direction a leader provides, (b) the extent of socioemotional support a leader offers, and (c) the readiness level that followers display in performing a definite task or objective.

Some employees appear low in task readiness than others because of little ability or training, or insecurity; all this entails the need to have different leadership approach-the situational. To be highly effective, the leader could consider the followers' readiness levels when deciding how relationship-oriented or task-oriented behavior they needed to be (Fox, 2012; Vecchio, 2007). Depending on the level of followers' willingness and ability, the leader could adjust her or his behavior accordingly. In brief, in this approach leaders examine the readiness level of her/his followers and then tell, sell, participate, or delegate (Daft, 2014).

In sum, I argue that compared to the trait and behavior approaches, the situational leadership approach works well with ECCE leadership. I think the following reasons would further clarify the point. First, it seems effective in developing effective leaders. Second, it is found practical-it is easily applied in various settings such as ECCE centers. Next, "it has prescriptive value. Whereas many theories of leadership are descriptive in nature, the situational approach is prescriptive. It tells you what you should and should not do in various contexts" (Northouse, 2018, p.99). Flexibility is the fourth positive element of the approach. The approach emphasizes in leadership science the one-size-fits-all approach could not serve the purpose. Overall, followers have unique needs and deserve the conditional treatment of their leaders. For this reason, out of the

three leadership behaviors mentioned above, I tend to choose the situational leadership behavior of Hersey and Blanchard to investigate the ECCE leadership.

## **2.4 Leadership in Early Childhood Care and Education**

The leadership of ECCE appears to be a recent research undertaking in the study area. The literature on leadership in the early years is quite young and research in this arena is relatively limited (Talan, Bloom, & Kelton, 2014). Despite that, Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) argued that leadership in ECCE is not a dirty word. The authors argue that in the field of ECCE, leadership cannot be left to chance. Instead, they suggest that leadership is one of the important components of effective ECCE provision. Added to that, Hujala et al.'s (2016) cross-cultural study conducted in three countries (Finland, Japan, and Singapore) indicated that leadership is one of the most important tasks depicted in ECCE centers. For instance, Hujala et al.'s finding underscored the similarities between the three countries, as leadership is one of the most important tasks in the ECCE settings. Likewise, Hujala et al. added that the concept of ECCE leadership has been drawn from educational leadership research and the business literature. Broadly speaking, one can observe striking similarities between the common issues of the leadership science and the ECCE leadership, and obviously with its particulars. ECCE leadership needs to have the mind and heart of caring, distributing roles and responsibilities, and pedagogical leadership. It involves creating change, not maintaining the status quo.

Besides, Hujala et al.'s (2016) study uncovered the importance of leadership in improving the quality of ECCE programs. The desirable attributes, roles, and responsibilities of the ECCE leaders include: organizing a system to cultivate a shared understanding, nurturing cooperative practices, maintaining respectful relationships among teachers, being in charge of enhancing teachers' development, and managing center crisis (Hujala et al., 2016). In the words of Rodd

(2001), “ECCE leadership seems to be a subtle amalgam of abilities, traits, motives, intentions, and roles that combine 'below the waterline' to give rise to certain behavior” (p.12).

Paraphrasing Hujala (2004) and Nivala (1999), Hujala et al. (2016) write, the contextual leadership approach offers the theoretical base for the practices of leadership in ECCE settings. Adding, the approach allows to investigate, “the interaction between the different levels (micro and macro levels) and perceives the ECCE mission and core tasks as a socially constructed, situational, and interpretive phenomenon” (Hujala et al., 2016, p.406). The approach frames the investigation of the ECCE leadership at micro and macro levels. To discharge their roles and responsibilities the sector leaders should be acquainted with adequate knowledge, experience, pedagogical philosophies, and leadership skills (Hujala et al., 2016).

The leadership of ECCE matters. Quite many studies (e.g., Bøe et al., 2017; Chan, 2018; Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013; Ho, 2012; McKnight, 2017; Sims et al., 2015; Waniganayake, 2013) disclosed in ECCE centers, leadership to be a key element. If the essence of the ECCE program is to generate both the short-range and long-range benefits in one’s life; especially for children from low socio-economic backgrounds, the existence of competent ECCE leadership was found to produce positive developments (Hallet, 2013; Whitebook et al., 2012). These include better academic outcomes, more positive student–teacher relationships, better behavior, and better social skills, creating a language-rich environment, sensitive teachers, child-focused communication, smaller teacher/child ratios, and lower staff turnover. In short, successful ECCE leaders exert a powerful influence on the effectiveness of the ECCE program implementation.

Contrastingly, unsuccessful programs came from incompetent, less involved and uncommitted, less skillful, poor relationships with different stakeholders, and less experienced ECCE leaders. That sounds why Klatt and Hiebert (2000, p.6) highlighted John Kotter’s quote, “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires

them to make it happen despite the obstacles.” The idea is in all matters (including the day-to-day nitty-gritty cases) leadership has been found to be central to successful ECCE centers. However, Bøe et al. (2017) indicate that in contemporary ECCE centers leadership is found to be, “hectic, fragmented, and complex” (p.608).

On the contrary, Kagan and Hallmark (2001) explained that ECCE leadership is one of the greatest professions in the world. Therefore, it needs to be acknowledged. Kagan and Hallmark’s ECCE leadership role list incorporates good understanding of child development, valuing cultural diversity, encouraging parent engagement and community involvement, and carefully watching the real rights of children to be children and at a time taking risks. This indicates that a successful ECCE leader begets successful ECCE centers. Dunlop (2008) also argued that a good leadership has a visible impact on children’s development.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Wise and Wright (2012) strongly argued that virtually at the international level, early year’s leadership has been threatened. Wise and Wright postulated that compared to elementary or high school leaders, the lower the salary, the absence of designated career path, and the poor qualification attributed to the field reflects the lower and negative image. Regarding this, a handful of studies (Bush, 2012; Meade, 2003; Rodd, 2006, 2013; Thornton, 2005) conducted on ECCE leadership reflected the poorly observed state of the field.

In the same vein, Dunlop’s (2008) review noted that ECCE leaders are in short of leadership training and under-prepared for this role. In line with this, a study by Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) and Rodd (2005) argued that in many sites ECCE leadership positions are accidentally assumed. Conversely, Ho (2012) convincingly argued that the leadership of ECCE would not be left to chance. This is because, like other levels of the education sector, the leadership of ECCE would play paramount roles. A recent study conducted by Chan (2018) sheds light on the positive link between ECCE leaders’ professional development and its positive outcome. Chan

noted a positive relationship between ECCE leaders' preparation and the ability to strike a balance between rules and human considerations in leading their staff members. In connection with this, Carter and Sood (2014) said: "leadership must provide the dance floor and pick the right music to get colleagues dancing together and building trusting relationships" (p.68). Chan's study suggested that today's ECCE leaders must undertake continuous professional development.

Likewise, the profession of ECCE leadership has experienced other challenges. First, the field has been stigmatized. "The stigma of early years only being about 'play', may have created a divide between early years and later school education" (Dunlop, 2008, p.10). Second, compared to other sectors of education, nearly all the ECCE leadership positions have been dominated by female heads. As per Dunlop's (2008) study, the rationale behind this practice seems the inappropriateness of the masculinized leadership model to respect and recognize the cooperative aspect of the system. However, no evidence supports this assumption; instead, it seems gender stereotyping.

Additionally, Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) indicated the field of ECCE is overwhelmed by the feminized workforce. In 2013, a study conducted in Greece also ascertained that ECCE professionals are mostly women (99.04%, above OECD average, 97%) (Argyropoulou, 2013). A study by Wise and Wright (2012) also found a consistent result with other literature in that the field of leadership in ECCE seems to resonate with the feminized leadership model. This is because women leaders seem keen on a caring leadership style. Regarding this, Wise and Wright tend to conclude that women leaders are found better than their male counterparts are in that women's moral development is rooted in the idea of nurturing, relationship, and interdependence. The implication of all this is that in the ECCE centers, women leaders might exhibit better commitment. Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) argued that this appears so, due to the very development of the field and the nature of the job itself. They asserted that in fact, the field is not exclusively

gender-based but the conception of the field and the societal perception seem the point of the debate.

The following conclusions might provide the extended premises for the overwhelming involvement of women in ECCE. Early childhood care and education arose out of a “perceived societal need to provide substitute maternal care and home-like environments for disadvantaged children’s circumstances and/or labor market’s demands for women in the workplace” (Wagner, 2006, p.300). Women were therefore the leading figures in the early development of ECCEs, both as substitute mothers, poor mothers, and working mothers.

Overall, I argue that what matters is not which gender dominates the field instead putting children at the center of the table seems worthwhile. Indeed, due to socio-cultural influences associating the field with female teachers might not be a problem. The problem arises when there is a tendency to give an underdog position for every activity when it is not.

When this happens, primarily children could be victimized. Secondly, teachers including, the leader could be underpaid, undervalued, and high rates of staff turnover are likely to be observed. Shortly, the unfair attitude attached to the profession could strongly affect not only the proper functioning of the ECCE leadership but also the system. Dunlop (2008) noted that many ECCE leaders do not acknowledge their leadership role as part of their professional responsibility, but leadership has been invisibly taking place like, “an abominable snowman, whose footprints are everywhere but nowhere to be seen” (Bennis & Nanus, 1997, p. 4).

Modestly, to bring about significant change and establish a just working situation the role of leadership seems crucial. Among other things, the likely effective ECCE leaders need to possess the most common leadership skills such as technical knowledge and skills, including pedagogical leadership; interpersonal skills (social skills); and conceptual ability (cognitive skills) (Dunlop, 2008; Rodd, 2001; Yukl, 2014). Bloom’s (1997, p.14) definition (as cited in Rodd, 2001, p.12)

summarized the concept of leadership in early childhood as, “a way of thinking and feeling about ourselves, our colleagues, and about the children and families we serve”.

Robust leadership in the ECCE settings is a matter of concern, heartfelt communication, and a sufficient amount of necessary qualifications, among other things (Woodrow & Busch, 2008). In ECCE centers, communication and interpersonal relationships appear the building blocks on which other activities are based (Rodd, 1989; 2012). Positive human relationships develop feelings of trust, safety, security, and openness. That is why Rodd advises that a person who is in charge of the leadership of ECCE should be accustomed to these personal attributes and psychological make-up.

In addition, due to the unique feature of the ECCE settings, ECCE leaders should move with the wave of the tide. This would mean that the leader-follower assumption needs to be well managed. This is because if the ECCE center teachers feel professionally competent they are not likely to see themselves as followers or led. For this reason, a skillful leader needs to see these people as companions or colleagues, not followers. Indeed, as one progresses through different tiers of leadership, the companion could be a leader in his/her own right (Adair, 2015). This symbolizes that ECCE leaders should be able to place themselves on an equal footing with the other professional colleagues. By doing so, ECCE leaders create an opportunity to win the trust of others so that they manage to boost teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) for instance, which is the subject of the next section.

## **2.5 The Leadership of ECCE in Cultivating Teachers Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

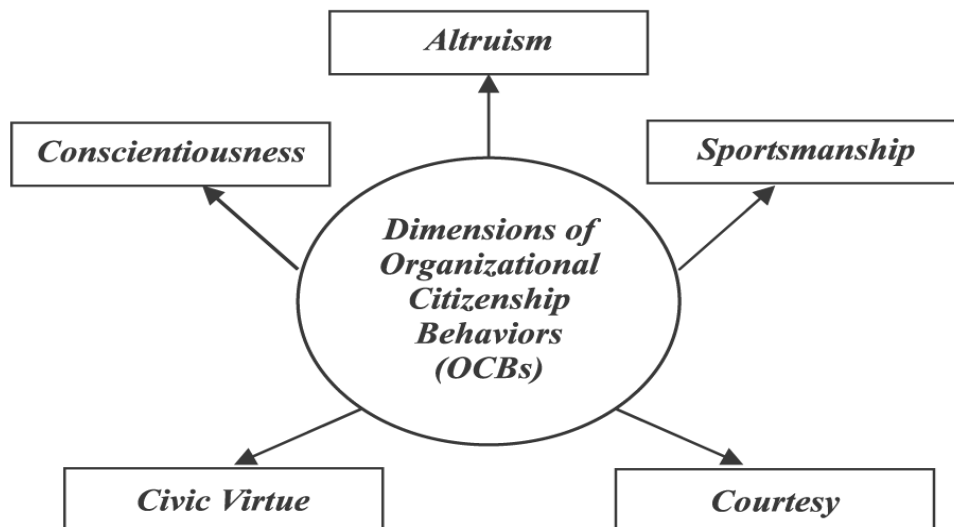
Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) refers to discretionary behavior that increases organizational effectiveness by helping coworkers, supervisors, and the organization. Assisting newcomers, aiding co-workers, and avoiding frequent fault finding are examples of OCB (Krishnan & Arora, 2008). These extra-role (non-mandatory) behaviors are not part of the

individual's traditional job description and cannot be enforced. The individual does not receive any compensation or training for OCB (Krishnan & Arora, 2008). OCB can be directed either towards other individuals or towards the organization (Krishnan & Arora, 2008). As cogently noted by Smith, Organ, and Near (1983) and Organ (1997), organizational citizenship behavior is alternatively conceptualized as an extra-role behavior, discretionary behavior, the good soldier syndrome (Organ, 1988), beyond the job, contextual performance.

This construct is heavily influenced by Organ (1988). For Organ (1988), OCB is a multidimensional concept and there are five common dimensions of OCB: (a) *altruism*, willingly helping other colleagues (less skilled or new employees, and assisting co-workers who are overloaded) or always being there to lend a helping hand (Dimitriades, 2007; Kim, 2014; Krishnan & Arora, 2008) and being selfless towards the organization by going beyond job requirements (Ullah Bukhari, 2009); (b) *conscientiousness*, dedication to the job (faithful adherence to rules and regulations) (Kim, 2014) and desire to exceed formal requirements (doing things beyond the call of the duty), conservation of resources (never wasting work hours and working long days), punctuality (keeping the organization's rules and regulations) (Ullah Bukhari, 2009; Diefendorff et al., 2002), and make affable relationship with peers (Dimitriades, 2007); (c) *courtesy*, behavior that prevents problems from occurring or avoiding practices that make others work difficult by giving advance notices and encouraging other co-workers when they are discouraged (Diefendorff et al., 2002; Dimitriades, 2007; Kim, 2014; Krishnan & Arora, 2008); (d) *sportsmanship* a professional's ability (tolerance) to withhold minor impositions without hassle or protest (Kim, 2014; Krishnan & Arora, 2008) or a behavior focuses on solutions rather than making a big deal out of small issues (Diefendorff et al., 2002; Ryan, 2001) and; (e) *civic virtue*, a behavior exposed by taking part in both official and unofficial activities and showing responsible concern for the wellbeing of the

organization (Ullah Bukhari, 2009), (e.g., providing innovative ideas to augment organizational growth and development).

**Figure 1. The five dimensions of organizational citizenship behaviors**



Source: Garg and Rastogi, 2006, p.53.

### ***2.5.1 How Do ECCE Leaders Cultivate Teachers OCB?***

Early childhood care and education leaders' role has a profound impact on the organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) of their followers. Academics in the field believe that there is a positive relationship between ECCE leaders and OCBs. Over the past few years, bulks of research argued that quality ECCE centers do not exist apart from effective leaders. For example, Bagobiri, Asimiran, and Basri (2014) noted that an effective leader creates quality staff. Sylva et al. (2004) also convincingly argues the presence of long-serving staff is the result of robust leadership. Hence, I have made this review wishing to understand the leadership of ECCE from the point of teachers' OCB.

A preponderance of evidence has documented that a competent leader appears to be keen on cultivating his/ her colleagues OCB. Researchers focused on leadership and educational institutions repeatedly echo this. A good leader supports high levels of teaching and learning. A

“leader can impact the lives of anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand students during a year” for example (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011, p. 2). Most importantly, in improving ECCE centers the value of teachers and leaders working together surpassed over a separate endeavor. That is why Sims et al. (2015) write, “leadership is dynamic and co-constructed by a multitude of players and members of the organization are constantly adjusting to context and engaging in meaning-making” (p.152). Sims et al.’s (2015) report supports the present widespread interest in Ethiopia in improving leadership as a key to the successful implementation of large-scale reform. Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) also argued that the direct and indirect effects of leadership on child development account for about a quarter of the total school effect. Therefore, it could be possible to shed light on the positive influence of ECCE leaders in cultivating their teachers' OCB.

Likewise, ECCE leaders are found to be crucial in making or breaking teachers' job appetite, this in turn affects their OCB. In today's climate of heightened expectations, leaders are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. This challenging job requires ability, energy, and commitment, and education offices are often looking for people who can walk on water. Although there has always been the sense that leadership matters, the actual behaviors, and priorities of effective leaders are in a clearer focus now than they have ever been (Chan, 2018). Equally important, the new understanding of the leader's impact on learning motivates everyone who shares a common aspiration for all students to attend high-quality ECCE centers. Yet, the point is to what extent do teachers' citizenship behavior is developed and how the leadership influenced the issue is the point to be embarked on.

Moreover, the following five assumptions underlined the starting point of this research. First, in the field of education, as in many institutional contexts, in recent years leadership has taken increased importance (Friedman, 2011). As argued by Bass (1990) leadership is an indispensable element in the success or failure of institutions. Therefore, to cope with and survive

in today's volatile environment the existence of commendable leaders is crucial (Ibrahim et al., 2004). Equally, the importance of leadership as a predictor of OCB has been well established in Western settings (Lian & Tui, 2012).

In accordance with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), leaders are viewed as proactive and self-regulating rather than as reactive organisms propelled by environmental forces or motivated by invisible inner impulses. Human functioning is the product of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental dimensions that create interactions that result in triadic reciprocity. In education sectors such as ECCE, the existence of teachers OCB appears to be a high priority. Thus, Sharma and Jain (2014) clarified what it means "while there can be a definite ratio of input to output when it comes to other inanimate factors of production, in the case of human beings there cannot be any such fixed ratio. This human element if, handled properly by the leader, two, plus two can equal five" (p.60).

Virtually every nation currently facing major educational reform has openly accepted the important role played by ECCE center leaders in producing successful change (Cheong, 2000). In today's competitive and demanding educational life, the educational masterpiece appears the ECCE leader (Bartoletti, & Connelly, 2013). Without well-qualified and motivated leaders, reform could succeed sporadically and the goal of proper child development is likely to be threatened (Tirozzi, 2001). In the Ethiopian education landscape, ECCE leaders have assumed the major force in the center reform (Ministry of Education, 2018). Much of the current literature (e.g., Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013) also suggests that leaders are perhaps the most significant key constituent in establishing effective centers. ECCE leaders play a key role in making ECCE centers as effective as possible. For ECCE centers to be successful and to get extraordinary things done leaders appear responsible for cultivating teachers OCB.

If this holds true, ECCE center leaders bridge the gap between centers' vision with an accurate picture of reality (Retna, 2011). A highly effective ECCE leader is not called to the job per se, but more importantly to the opportunity to make a difference in the ECCE center. This could mean a change in the educational landscape, heal an ailing ECCE center, or work for the concepts of greater accountability, equity, and excellence (Fook & Sidhu, 2009). Outstanding ECCE leaders are sense makers of their fellow compatriots and help create a sustainable ECCE center culture that could enhance students' and teachers' productivity (Fook & Sidhu, 2009).

Despite the fact that leadership is highly valued in human society and the study of it has progressed from a focus on leader traits to a focus on leader behavior, it appears as essentially a missing ingredient in education (Claye, 1962). A sporadic concern is likely conferred to the professional literature (Schyns & Sczesny, 2010). Most studies (e.g., File & Shibeshi, 2012; Zeleke & Girma, 2014) in this country have also focused on leadership styles, rather than on leadership from the point of teachers OCB. It could also be argued that teachers attitude towards their ECCE leaders' capabilities and their working conditions determine teachers' OCB. During the past few decades, increased interest in ECCE center leadership has meant that it has become an important component of the ECCE center (Retna, 2011). Nonetheless, studies conducted in Hong Kong (Chan, 2018), China (Zhu, 2009), and Greece (Argyropoulou, 2013) found that majority of the ECCE leaders were rated as ineffective by their teachers. In 2006, a study conducted by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) entitled *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector (ELEYS)* revealed "much of the existing literature on leadership has been overly prescriptive and lacking examples of effective practices" (p.26). This reflects that leaders appear reluctant in cultivating teachers OCB among other things.

What is more, though, the concepts of organizational citizenship have been discussed in many studies of organizations, studies on OCB in connection with ECCE center leadership seems

to be non-existent. Examining OCB in ECCE appears quite new. Consequently, to ensure ECCE center efficiency, ECCE centers demand teachers' cooperation, benevolence, self-sacrifice, and, at times, extra effort or the OCB (Yılmaz & Taşdan, 2009). In this sense, the traditionally conceived ideas of one-man leadership that have been rooted in the personal qualities and characteristics of the leader (Nivala & Hujala, 2002) could lose its cannon. Instead, when involved to be part of the leadership, every staff member stands with the vision of the organization so that the sense of working for the common good takes power over the individual interest. The monolithic kind of leadership, which is dishonored by contemporary thinkers and teachers, left the space for the recently introduced leadership agenda that is framed on the notion of systems thinking called-the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Accordingly, though, traditionally the leadership of ECCE has been attached to the personal qualities of the leader (Nivala & Hujala, 2002) the contribution of many people involved in the process yields a better result (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Dunlop, 2008).

## **2.6 Pedagogical Leadership**

Pedagogy and leadership are two essential concepts of educational literature. A vast body of literature (e.g., Ang, 2014; Tzuo, Liang, & Yang, 2013) has attempted to clarify the notions. The paramount concern of both notions seems rooted in human interactions and relationships. In their circles, though these notions appear sufficiently elusive, in educational institutions like ECCEs, the integration of these concepts form pedagogical leadership. The former is devoted to how to educate people and the latter dwells on how to lead or influence people. To begin with, the term pedagogy is derived from the Greek language (*paidi' pa' go*), literally meaning, "Leading a child" (Male & Palaiologou, 2013, p. 216). Siraj-Blatchford (2002) characterized pedagogy as the "set of instructional strategies and techniques which enable learning to take place and offer opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions within a particular social and

material context” (p.28). Overall, pedagogy can be conceived as a social process that scaffolds children’s learning and it could best take place in a context where human nature, knowledge, and production, in relation to educational ends, are exercised, not when the process of teaching and learning and practice is solely conditioned by policy and legal prerequisites (Ang, 2014).

Pedagogical practices, like leadership, fall under the influence of the entire environment. That is why the idea of pedagogy goes beyond the common teaching and learning methods. It creates an amalgam with leadership because it is a “triangulated concept based on the relationship of social praxis that is concerned with theory, practice and a set of social axes” (Male & Palaiologou, 2013, p.220). In this context, empirical studies (e.g., Male & Palaiologou, 2013) indicated that the activities and practices of pedagogy are not only limited to educational settings or the internal ecology, which includes the active participation of learners, teachers, family, and the local community. Instead, it is a notion that is embedded in the external environment (the wider socio-political, economic, psychological, philosophical, historical, biological, and educational spheres among others). Therefore, in the 21st-century pedagogy can be observed as a set of justifiable belief that cultivates learners to construct knowledge in their ecology by creating productive interactions and relationships.

Essentially, pedagogy is about creating a child-friendly learning environment and the catalyst for knowledge construction. To this, the definition given by Moss (2006) is quite telling. For Moss, pedagogy is a “relational and holistic approach working with people’ and within the construct such as learning, care, and upbringing” (p.32). From this point, pedagogy is likely conceived as a set of practices that shape educational institutions around its core tasks, to meet learners’ expectations and policy standards. In brief, the relationship between pedagogy and the environment talks louder in the effectiveness of education in general and ECCE in particular (Male & Palaiologou, 2013). Reviewing the works of different researchers, Cecchin (2009) stated “If

pedagogical institutions are to be lead appropriately and in a qualified manner, this must be done in ways that are pertinent to the essential pedagogical characteristics and content of the centers (p.23).

In connection with this situation, I argue that integrating leadership, as an overarching process would make the functioning of the system like that of a well-oiled machine. Almeen et al.'s (2015) study also argue that pedagogical leadership is, “a desirable approach for education” (p.124). Besides, a recent study by Heikka (2014) reveals as pedagogical leadership focuses on responsibilities for pedagogy and encourages the development of both students and teachers. In this regard, although, there is a sort of consensus about what pedagogical leadership is, how it evolves and how it relates to education and leadership, the construct has been used in circumstances where both the pedagogy and the leadership touch are combined.

However, inconsistent understandings have been observed among researchers (Heikka, 2014; Lee, 2016), who attempted to clarify the concept of pedagogical leadership compared to instructional leadership. Both Heikka and Lee argued that the concept of pedagogical leadership and instructional leadership have been used interchangeably. Typically, the Finnish and American researchers maintain the term pedagogical leadership as equivalent to instructional leadership (Lee, 2016). They agree to lament the essences of both notions represent the process of “leading teaching and learning in schools” (Lee, 2016, p.24). Conversely, other researchers view pedagogical leadership and instructional leadership as conflicting notions. For example, Lee (2016) contends that there are several clear differences between instructional leadership and pedagogical leadership.

As stated in Lee (2016), pedagogical leadership is concerned with students' learning while instructional leadership is concerned about teachers' instruction. The author further notes that, pedagogical leadership prefers a flat structure to instructional leadership. Moreover, pedagogical leadership is concerned with holistically building a professional learning community, whereas

instructional leadership is narrowly focused on only one part of the instruction and learning approach. In brief, the notions have similarities and differences. Therefore, to better understand the dichotomies careful examination of the two concepts is recommended.

Conversely, many scholars (e.g., Almeen et al., 2015; Lahtero & Kuusilehto-Awale, 2015; Lee, 2016; Macneill et al., 2003; Male & Palaiologou, 2013) convincingly argue that the pedagogical leadership approach works well in ECCE centers. As cogently noted by Peng and Vašátková (2016), the following four viewpoints might give a better clarification for why this study has chosen pedagogical leadership as one of the points of analyses over instructional leadership. The first viewpoint looks at pedagogical leadership as learning-centered leadership or leadership of learning. The second standpoint focused on the role of pedagogical leaders. The third researchers' category stared at how pedagogical leadership has been implemented, how children are served. In this regard, MacNeil, Cavanagh, and Slicox (2005) added "since the learners are essential participants in the discussion, pedagogical leadership focuses on dialogue rather than a monologue (p.4). The final group of researchers thought that, among other things, the mandates of pedagogical leadership consist of establishing educational goals, curriculum planning, evaluating the school, and out of school-related factors. Essentially, Almeen et al.'s (2015) concluded the more the ECCE centers were deemed to be successful with children's learning, the synergistic relationships between and among center leaders, the school community, and other stakeholders' which calls for the employment of pedagogical leadership seem not a choice.

### ***2.6.1 Pedagogical Leadership in ECCE***

Pedagogical leadership in ECCE is a recent concept with limited literature and research (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). However, in the process of serving the needs and interests of children, it facilitates the process of learning, teaching, and community engagement. Particularly, pedagogical leadership also appears as a barometer to gauge the child-friendliness of the ECCE

center practices. Besides, it provides a holistic approach to learning, because it is assumed, “a pedagogical leader sets out to address the complete child” (Moss, 2006, p. 32).

Ord et al. (2013) noted that in ECCE centers time has come for pedagogical leadership to lead the whole activity of the learning process and beyond. Ord et al. further asserted that to have a positive impact on children’s overall development, leaders’ needs to get closer to the business of teaching and learning endeavor. A similar position is embraced by Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2009). For example, Robinson et al., asserted that, if pedagogical leadership has focused on educational purposes (to serve and benefit children) the tasks of a leader include creating educational goals, curriculum development and implementation, and evaluating teachers and teaching appear among others. Likewise, it could be highlighted that pedagogical leadership “commands particular interest because it is the pedagogy that impacts not only in the long term but also most immediately on children” (Clarkin-Phillips, 2009, p. 22). Leo (2015) is concerned that if the essence of instituting educational organizations such as ECCE centers is to bring about change that could produce a higher standard of learners' performance, heightened socio-economic development, and improved levels of civility pedagogical leadership seems the focus of the day.

As cogently noted by Almeen et al. (2015), it also empowers teachers to make child-friendly decisions in their day-to-day classroom interactions and encourage them to develop and lead the school and the community at large. This is because in every school context and school culture creating and developing synergistic relationships among children, staff, family, community, and Government appears crucial. Moreover, Contreras (2016) argues that in the process of policy implementation and transforming the education sector the role of pedagogical leadership is critical. Especially, in a country where training on pedagogical leadership is lacking, the process of early childhood care and education seems poorly accomplished.

**2.6.1.1 Active Learning Pedagogy.** In describing, what pedagogy is and how it works, Freire (1986), in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, came up with two dominant and conflicting models of pedagogy. These include the banking model (a child is a passive receiver) and the problem-posing (a child is an active interactor) model. Accordingly, Freire (1986) described the banking concept of education as an instrument of oppression and the problem-posing model as an instrument of liberation. He further clarified that banking education rejects dialogue and favors the monolithic and one way approaches to knowledge. The model treats students as passive recipients of information so that it inhibits creativity. This time, it appears that the potential of the child is stunted because the destination of their learning is framed in advance. In contrast, problem-posing education accepts dialogue as invaluable means to construct knowledge and develop critical thinkers. This can be summarized as a pedagogy of relationships or interaction (Freire, 1986). In brief, the banking system of education resonates with the teacher dominated approach, whereas, the problem-posing concept of Freire parallels with the active learning pedagogy (Freire, 1986).

Active learning pedagogy is a response to the will of the child (Derebssa, 2006). It has been emanated from the interests, needs, and capacities of the child (Fallace, 2015). In this context, the nature of the child dictates methods (means) and ends of education of the child. The questions of how (pedagogy) and what should be taught (curriculum) could be responded to follow the natural order of child development. This in turn implies the developmentally appropriate pedagogy. Here, perhaps what sounds worthwhile is that the child is the major concern of the ECCE classroom rather than the teacher or the textbook. Above all, in ECCE centers, if the active learning methodology is well utilized the child remains the ‘co-constructor, rather than reproducer, of identity, culture, and knowledge’ (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999).

**2.6.1.1.1 Why Active Learning Pedagogy Matters?** It could be argued that there is a wide consent among scholars in the field (Froebel, 1897; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1967 & 1978) that a child reared in an active learning pedagogy fetches success in his/her lifetime. Schooling at early childhood care and education centers seem to form a significant nodal point at which a dependable citizen began to flourish or set a foundation if it is driven by active learning approach. Considering this, Sage and Baldwin (2012) documented that active learning methodology served an inherent pedagogical function. In the same study, they highlighted that preschoolers are responsive to the active learning pedagogy.

The preeminent cognitive development theorists of the 20th century (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1967 & 1978) also emphasized the crucial role of active learning pedagogy for the child's cognitive development. They argued that active learning pedagogy offers the child a multitude of opportunities. For instance, when children are made to get involved in a hands-on type of learning a child can construct knowledge and meaning of the world from the environment and his/ her day-to-day interactions. Likewise, a child could be found fair, more reasonable, confident, trustworthy, creative, problem solver, communicative, and keen on social skills such as collaboration, empathy, self-regulation, impulse control, and motivation. The chance to commit a crime, being emotional, and reveal misbehavior is almost nonexistent. In sum, as disclosed by Nicolopoulou (1993) active learning pedagogy has cognitive and non-cognitive values.

Contrary to that, children learning in the ECCE environment devoid of active learning pedagogy (be it the global North or the South) can encounter several problems (Patte, 2010; Patte & Brown, 2011). To begin with, a large volume of academic content provided to ECCE children can let them have a negative impression of education. More specifically, they may consider schooling a laborious and boring enterprise (Sage & Baldwin, 2012). A child who lacks to experience age-appropriate activities such as active learning pedagogy is likely to fall short of

physical, social, and emotional skills, if not futile. For the same reason, a child who spends too much of his/ her time in content-oriented schools may be cognitively prepared but at the same time lack non-cognitive skills such as socialization. That may expose them to anti-social behaviors ranging from stress to commit suicide (Patte, 2010; Patte & Brown, 2011).

In the field of neuroscience, a study conducted by Patte (2010) added that eliminating active learning pedagogy from the schools implies an increase in inappropriate child behavior. It also impairs the development of social skills. In the same way, it impedes the physical health of children. Besides, it crushes the most enduring quality of children: their human spirit. Patte (2010) indicated “Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), may result not from faulty brain wiring or chemistry but from a restraint on the urge to play for example” (p. 5).

**2.6.1.1.1 Active Learning Pedagogy: Ethiopian Context.** In the context of Ethiopia, a study conducted by Woldehanna and Gebremedhin (2012), revealed a positive correlation of early year’s cognitive development with the later ages of a lifetime. Particularly, for the development of both the cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of the child, the proper implementation of active learning pedagogy plays a significant role. Yet, the contribution of active learning pedagogy was not the thoroughly discussed-one reason why this study sought to examine the role of an active learning pedagogy in ECCE centers.

The recently introduced component of the preprimary education called the “O”-classes accommodate a good number (about 2.1 million or 81% of the total child population who are admitted to the ECCE program) of disadvantaged children, deserves due attention (Ministry of Education, 2019). If this holds, it is likely to at least help put them on the same boat with their counterparts (the urban children from the well-to-do parents). Because of this, at least this group of people may walk via the same trajectory as far as ECCE is concerned. In brief, if children of this group are allowed to involve in a child-friendly learning environment, the gift of life that is

possibly deduced from active learning pedagogy could be well off. As astutely put by Han et al. (2010), active learning pedagogy creates a fertile ground in encouraging creativity and other socio-emotional skills and it could make a difference.

Nevertheless, Tigistu (2013) indicated that, in Ethiopia, for several years play-oriented pedagogy was a buzzword. Quite some ECCE teachers seem trained to nurture children through a play-focused approach. In practice, the situation is different. Hence, in ECCE setting Tigistu's data reveals "one can see more work on literacy and far less play in kindergarten." As indicated by one of the respondents of his study, "Parents' demand and expectation is one factor that drives preschool practices towards more work on literacy and numeracy rather than skills associated with social and emotional development" (Tigistu, 2013, p.156).

In the same way, the poor attention offered to the established "O"-classes worsened the manifestation of active learning pedagogical practices. Among other things, the current system seems to be characterized by the absence of a child-oriented teaching method (Tigistu, 2013). In 2015, data from the Ministry of Education also indicated the availability of untrained preschool teachers (e.g., in 2003/4, 2006/7, 2008/9, 2010/11, and in 2013/14, 25.85%, 33.84%, 50.96%, 62.89%, and 24.53% respectively), serving the ECCE centers without any training. Adding, none of the national planning documents has included budgets attached to the ECCE sector, and a sporadic quality assurance system is indicated (Mundy et al., 2014).

## **2.7 Conceptual Framework of the Study**

This section presents the conceptual underpinnings of the study. At the outset, the current study likely triggers to uncover the 'black box' practices of the ECCE leadership in the Ethiopian context. My episteme belief dwells on how the leadership of ECCE strives to facilitate the well-being of the coming generation. Specifically, can these leaders scaffold children to make them

‘captains of their destiny rather than prisoners of their fate’ appear the moral behind this study. Thus, the fundamental concern of the current study resides on the leadership of ECCE by considering the ECCE leaders, teachers, parents, and ECCE experts as a unit of analysis. Indeed, among other things, the interaction and the relationships between and among the following variables: leadership deployment; leadership behavior; OCB; and pedagogical leadership frames the what and the how of the study from the point of my general understanding. Added to that, they seem both complex and exciting. It is worth mentioning to cite the two key theoretical frameworks, which are highly recommended to frame this study. The theories include Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) and the contextual theory of leadership (Nivala, 1999, 2001).

A good number of empirical studies (e.g., Ishimine, 2011; Neal & Neal, 2013) affirmed that Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory fits well to frame studies conducted in ECCE settings- most notably, this study -the leadership of ECCE in the Ethiopian context. The tenet of the theory rests on the interaction between the dominant ecological layers: the micro-system (the internal environment) and the macrosystem (the external environment) for example. Most importantly, the bidirectional, fluid and interdependent nature of the interaction and relationships between and among these major components would qualify to form the whole system. The idea is, as it has been said time and again, in the general systems theory, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

On the subject of leadership in ECCE center two interacting and interdependent systems (layers of the environment) could be generated (see Figure 2 below). One of which, the leadership of ECCE, can be nested under the subsystem called the internal environment. In this category, the center of attention, the leadership of the sector is under a series of interactions and relationships with the emphasized components of this study. The second important aspect of interaction, the supra-system (the external environment), such as the national level ECCE policy materials, the

socio-economic situation, demographic situations, geographical conditions, political situation, culture as well as the international commitments among others, have positive and negative repercussions with the practices of the ECCE leadership. Hence, my general argument is that the leadership of ECCE could exist in an open environment where interaction and relationships are possible.

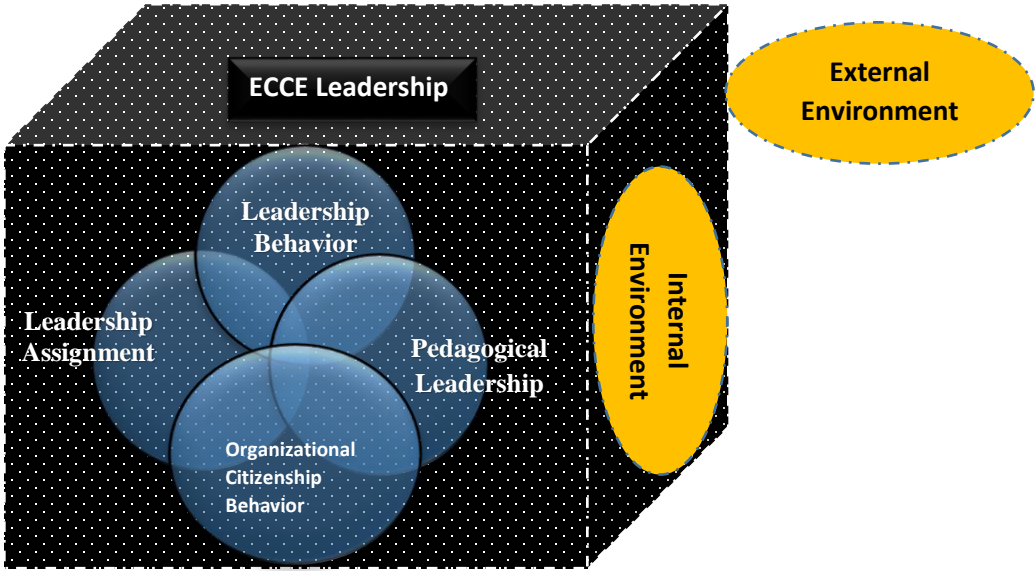
The interactions between the aforementioned leadership factors in a given environment are likely to determine the destiny or the fate of the child. To say it differently, the quality and the magnitude of the interaction in any one of the factors or layers could ripple throughout the other factors or layers. In the ECCE settings, the process of caregiving and caretaking no longer occur in solitude or exclusively in the education buildings; they have become part of all parties, viz., the community ecology, learners, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. In other words, services to be offered to the children of that level should be fused or synchronized to form the whole child. In that sense, leadership becomes praxis, and in particular, the ECCE leadership praxis seems to go beyond the simplicity of practice and its causality. The leadership of ECCE is likely to be imbued with theoretical substance and assisted by a systems theory of the setting (see Figure 2 below). Bluntly speaking, this study is framed by a micro-lens on leadership phenomenon (consisting leadership assignment, leadership behavior, on how leaders cultivate teachers OCB, the employment of pedagogical leadership, and challenges of ECCE leadership).

Compatibly, the contextual leadership theory, which has developed by Nivala (1999, 2001) and Hujala (2004), affords productive guidance for addressing leadership in ECCE settings. In harmony with Nivala's idea, Heikka (2013) succinctly noted that among other things, the secret behind the sound ECCE programs dwells on the sound pedagogical leadership enactments. Not surprisingly, it stands well with micro and macro levels, possibly with the interactive influences and interdependencies of multiple members in the sector. Coupled with the above-mentioned

theories Bøe and Hognestad (2015), Heikka (2014), and Hujala, Waniganayake, and Rodd's (2013) study chronicles that the leadership of ECCE could be hardly undertaken via the sole engagement of a leader by receiving orders from the higher-ups but through interdependent effort between multiple layers and collaborators. Congruently, a recent study by Heikka and Hujala (2013) asserts that the interdependence and enactment of multiple people together with the given environment is a core element of implementing pedagogical leadership.

As a whole, the practices of the leader of the ship in the context of ECCE is represented by the symbolic notion, the 'black box' metaphor, to imply the inclusive and reasonably detailed, multiple, and at times informal interactive components of the matter. Correspondingly, the four gears depicted the flow and the interdependence of the explored guiding key questions to be explored. The bidirectional arrow demonstrates the horizontal influences to be made between elements of the study. Besides, the broken lines indicated the permeable nature of the boundary so that it likely proves the ease of interaction, interdependence, and the bidirectional influences to be made between the external and internal ecosystems. For all intents and purposes, the conceptual framework seems to visualize the association of the ECCE leadership with its derivatives (the basic questions) and the influences it receives from the external environment and vice-versa. Figure 2 clarifies the scenario.

**Figure 2: Conceptual Framework: the Interacting Components of the ECCE Leadership**



**Source: Researcher’s Construction**

ECCE leadership is the sum of (1) leadership behavior (2) strategies of leadership assignment (3) organizational citizenship behavior and (4) pedagogical leadership. As indicated in the above diagram there is an interaction and an interdependent relationship among the components of ECCE leadership. Besides the broken lines that is found between the internal environment and the external environment depicted the flow of information and the interaction between the macro system and the micro systems of the ECCE unit.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the study's methodology, which includes: rationale for the qualitative study; description of the research setting; description of sampling and participants; data collection methods; procedures of data analysis; methods of verification; and it culminates with ethical considerations.

### 3.1 The Research Approach

The present study is guided by a constructivist paradigm. Ontologically, this approach allows me to investigate the leadership of ECCE. It helps determine the existing realities that are specific to the sites. That is because it is constructed by participants who experience the world from their perspectives (Hujala, Waniganayake, & Rodd, 2013). The epistemology of the paradigm also lets the construction of the findings be developed via the mutual engagement and common understandings of both the participants and myself. Methodically, I have collected data from the natural setting, where I have planned to start the concurrent data analysis. Most importantly, methodological triangulation (Hujala, 2004) is employed in the process of data collection as well as data analysis. I spent (about two hours interviewing each participant), observing the study sites (which includes the physical environment, the school facilities, and the actual teacher-child interactions), and analyzing documents.

In order to understand the phenomenon of leadership at ECCE centers in its real world, the study is conducted using a multisite qualitative case study as understood by Yin (2003). While employing case study, I'm mindful of Yin's advice on "why" or "how" questions are posed, when the examiner has little control over events, and when the emphasis is on a current experience within the real-life situation. Hence, the approach helped me investigate the leadership of ECCE in Ethiopia. I want to determine the existing realities unique to the study sites. In short, the employment of the design enabled me to conduct an in-depth study within the unit of analysis as it

operates (Patton, 2002). Overall, in education, a case study is often conceived as a catchall construct, help study a bounded phenomenon, viz., the leadership of ECCE (Hatch, 2002).

Thick descriptions of up to date phenomenon within its real-life situation is employed (e.g., see Fetene, 2009) from a variety of viewpoints in an attempt to understand the leadership of ECCE. In connection with this, paid attention to Sherman and Webb's (1988) advice: "for qualitative researchers, life is not a dress rehearsal; it is the real thing" (p.4). Thus, I have motivated participants to expound their perspectives on the issue. Again, I have listened absorbedly for special language and other clues that unveil meaning structures participants use to understand their worldviews (Hatch, 2002).

I have gathered data and started its analysis concurrently in each natural setting. I spent quite a lot of time interviewing participants (about two hours with each), observing the study site, taking notes and pictures' of the realities (which includes the physical environment, the preschool facilities, and the actual teacher-student interactions), and reviewing documents related to the practices' of ECCE leadership. After data collection, the analysis, interpretations are made; and a rich and full picture of a research situation is figured out (Yin, 2003). That enabled me to uncover the leadership of ECCE with special reference to the leadership behavior, teachers OCB, pedagogical leadership, and challenges in the study sites.

### **3.2 Why Qualitative Study?**

Researching ECCE is not a recent phenomenon. Although the first ECCE's institution, came to effect in 1937, the U.S. Head Start program began its exploration in the 1960s (Schweinhart, 2016). The qualitative approach received its formal shape after the "great paradigm war" between the aftermath of World War II to the 1970s (Hatch, 2002, p.4). Since then, it has managed to win the heart and minds of many researchers. In line with this, Hatch (2002), one of the recent advocates of qualitative research in education settings sheds light on why the qualitative

route fits the study of ECCE. Hatch advised that the best way (if any) “to find out what qualitative study is and what it can do is to read qualitative reports” (p. 2). Accordingly, I have consulted a considerable amount of qualitative studies (e.g., Alameen et al., 2015; Argyropoulou, 2013; Berger, 2015; Bøe et al., 2016; Hatch, 2002; Ishimine, 2011; Lee, 2016; Lee & Krauss, 2015; Murray & Clark, 2013; Papadopoulou et al., 2014; Rio-Roberts, 2009; Sims et al., 2015; Waniganayake, 2014). These empirical studies entail that studying leadership in the context of ECCE works well with a qualitative approach. Moreover, there are several reasons for that.

First, of the various reasons for employing qualitative research, Hujala, (2004, 2013), Hujala and Puroila (1998) and Nivala (1999) are in agreement with Waniganayake (2014) who reported that in the context of ECCE, leadership is perceived as “a socially constructed, situational, and interpretive phenomenon.” (p.66). Another study by Le Grange (2007), reveals that due to the nature of the field educational leadership (complexity, unpredictability, fluidity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity, for example), qualitative methods seem to better capture what is going on. Therefore, it could be argued that this idea lends itself to qualitative inquiry.

The second reason for using a qualitative approach was explained in a recent study by Sims et al. (2015) and Tresnak (2015). The studies illuminate that reality is constructed through the process of the active engagement and interactions of participants of the study. Creswell and Miller (2000) in *Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry*, reveal the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm, which says, “reality is socially constructed and it is what participants perceive it to be” (p.125). Added to that, Sims et al.(2015) and Tresnak (2015) are in agreement as the employment of qualitative research methods enables participants to share their perspectives and construct their understanding of the world (in this case, the leadership of ECCE). Thus, it can be concluded that one of the reasons the present study preferred a qualitative approach over others. By and large, to attest to the value of qualitative dimension Sherman and Webb (1988) utilized Dewey’s belief,

which says, “All inquiry arises out of actual, or qualitative, life. That is, the environments in which humans are directly involved” (p.12). Hence, the approach enables us to construct the practices of leadership in ECCE.

Third, Alameen et al. (2015) reported that the qualitative approach is appropriate to gather wealth and in-depth organic data, which is not often possible to be collected via quantitative methods. Berge’s (2015) finding is in agreement with Lee and Krauss (2015) in that the qualitative approach involves the in-depth interaction (face-to-face) between the researcher and the participant. Rodd (1997) argued that qualitative study permits personal contact with the interviewer and the articulation of more elaborate and thoughtful responses. This in turn could be considered as a key factor in the process of garnering quality data. Pertaining to the need to have qualitative methods, Alameen et al. (2015) noted, as the approach provides an opportunity to give textual descriptions of how people experience a given situation or phenomenon. The study also indicated as it enables to explain the possible “causal relationships” (the practices of the ECCE leadership for example) (p.668). This is in agreement with that of a recent study by Jarvie (2012). In so doing, the practices of leadership in ECCE settings could be explored, described, understood, and explained.

Fourth, Rio-Robert’s (2009) report reveals that to infer meaning, the qualitative study enables educational researchers to look into the specific details of the ECCE situation as it exists and repeatedly. In agreement with this, I argue that qualitative study stands beyond that. For example, speaking of the usefulness of the qualitative research Daft (1995, p.165), calls “the intangible cues” (cited in Savall et al., 2007, p.512) enabled me to infuse meaning.

Said differently, it seems safe to say that meaning is stemmed from the context of inquiry (Sherman & Webb, 1988). That is why Sharman and Webb (1988) rightly argued that the qualitative approach is “not incidentals or merely sugar-coating to get someone to pay attention” instead; it enables researchers to find out meaning out of the real experiences (p.19).

The fifth reason is that qualitative researchers (e.g., Hammarberg et al., 2016) often keep their eyes on the data sources' personal accounts and experiences together with the actual environment. Among other things, the argument by Tierney (2002) underscores "the only valid experience is personal experience" (p.393). In connection with this, Hammarberg et al.'s study emphasizes "the researcher puts him/herself in the position of the participant to understand how the world is from the person's perspective" (p.499). Hammarberg et al.'s study added that the contribution of qualitative research in assessing the participants' lived experience enables me to extract as much information as possible. Thus, it could be argued that research in the area of ECCE seems to employ qualitative methods to better elicit information regarding the experiences of leaders, teachers, parents, and experts in order to determine how to lead ECCE centers most effectively. In other words, it could allow me to gain each person's lived insights so that discover issues related to their practical experiences. Hence, in doing so, it could be argued that problems associated with the lack of contextual information related to the present study are improved.

In using a qualitative approach, the present study draws on qualitative methods to inductively gain a greater understanding (Thorgren & Omorede, 2015) of how the leadership of ECCE has been functioning. In fact, it could be argued that ECCE leaders of the twenty-first century are different from those studied in the past for two reasons: First, the impact of heightened parental expectation of their children's high achievement; and secondly, the policymakers daunting position towards the sector. Thus, to truly comprehend the practices of today's ECCE leaders it is becoming more necessary to precisely determine what counts as robust ECCE leadership (Rio-Roberts, 2009). In connection with this, Tierney (2002) suggests the purpose of conducting a qualitative study. Tierney noted that as a "tenet of qualitative research that has not changed over the last generation is that I ought not to generalize from this work" (p.385). Hence, this could be considered as one of the limitations of the approach.

An empirical study by Argyropoulou (2013) also noted the strength of qualitative research on studying ECCE. Specifically, Argyropoulou (2013) highlighted the suitability of the approach to explore sensitive issues and the ECCE leadership. Equally, Rio-Roberts (2009), in a review of J. Amos Hatch's *Early Childhood Qualitative Research*, highlights the applicability and valuable contribution of qualitative research in ECCE settings. For example, Argyropoulou's (2013) study is in agreement with Rio-Roberts review in that, compared to quantitative methods, sensitive or highly complex but important issues related to leadership, care, and education of the young children could better captured through the qualitative line. In addition, Rio-Roberts (2009) reveals the ineffectiveness of positivism as the compelling reason for undertaking qualitative inquiry in the ECCE settings. Generally, Rio-Roberts noted that studying ECCE through qualitative design better built a solid foundation for data: generation, construction, and its analysis. In spite of that, it is worth noting that most researchers are in quantitative approach, qualitative studies addressing ECCE receives little attention with regards to the leadership of ECCE (Al-Omari, 2011).

Coupled with the previous reasons the following four design elements further illuminate the need to have qualitative study. First, unlike quantitative study which adheres to the preplanned methods, qualitative research is cyclic and recursive (Sandall, Smith, Mclean, & Ramsey, 2002). Said differently, Morse et al. (2002) argued, "qualitative research is iterative rather than linear so that a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, sample recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis" (p. 10). In this regard, qualitative researchers (e.g., Alameen et al., 2015; Astalin, 2013) argue that the qualitative approach is the most flexible. This opens up a window of opportunity to revisit the data and the data source to develop mutual understandings of the leadership of ECCE. Second, it allows the use of substantive theory (e.g., theoretical or conceptual framework) to explain the phenomena to be investigated; so that easily understood by academia.

For instance, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as it has been used in this study. Third, it enables me to declare methodological theory as it stands here (qualitative multi-case study) to study the what and how of leadership in ECCE centers. Fourth, a study by Tierney (2002, p.387) indicated that trustworthiness calmed the negatively claimed methodical rigor such as validity and reliability surrounding the qualitative study. Moreover, the applicability of qualitative approaches fills the literature gap in the field of ECCE.

### **3.3 Qualitative Case Study Design**

A qualitative case study is generally scant in the leadership of ECCE (Bøe et al., 2017). Also, Starman (2013) asserted "case studies have been little understood" (p.28). The case study design which is applied throughout this paper in its part could not also describe issues with sufficient detail. Still, a multisite qualitative case study design appears to justify the applied method of this study.

As stated by Jenkins et al. (2018) qualitative case studies originally focused on a single setting and an in-depth examination but gradually following the observed limitations-a multisite case study design emerged. In the same way, Herriott and Firestone (1983) confirmed "multisite qualitative studies address the same research question in several settings using similar data collection and analysis procedures in each setting. They consciously seek to permit cross-site comparison without necessarily sacrificing within-site understanding" (p.14). Hence, in line with the advice of Baxter and Jack (2008), the study was conducted "across all of the subunits (cross-case analysis)" along with the selected six ECCE centers (p.550). With this understanding, utilizing a multisite qualitative case study should not be a surprise, as it may give this study a firm foothold to investigate leadership in the context of ECCE.

Hence, one of the reasons to employ this design includes the following: First, to understand particular instances in the current realities of leadership in ECCE centers. Next, to uncover what is

happening in the leadership practices of ECCE within the given boundary (the ECCE units). Further, to use multiple data gathering tools primarily using interviews (Yin, 2017). And to shed fresh light on the leadership of ECCE and bring its phenomenon to the fore (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

Overall, through this multisite qualitative case study, I collected data that supported answering my overarching research question. That is, *how leadership works in ECCE centers in Ethiopia?* I hoped to figure out more information about the leadership of ECCE. More specifically, I am interested to investigate how these leaders are assigned, behave, and employ pedagogical leadership within their respective boundaries. With the same lens, the current status of OCB, as well as challenges that impede the smooth operation of the ECCE leadership was explored.

### **3.4 The Research Setting**

The study is carried out in Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa City Administration, in Ethiopia. Six experienced ECCE centers are recruited purposefully. Based on location six centers are chosen from both regions (two from Addis Ababa and four from Oromia) while two sites are drawn from the rural Oromia region to see if there are variations and similarities. Based on reports of their previous performances of at least five years, I have also deliberately selected four ECCE centers from both regions that the education bureaus evaluated as excellent; and the remaining two ECCE centers, which are rated as poor.

The regions are selected for the following reasons. First, Oromia and the City Administration of Addis Ababa are recruited because they are among the first top four regions in terms of a high density of children enrollment population in the 4-6 years age group. While Oromia has a child student population of 3,014,441, Addis Ababa has 179,004 (Ministry of Education, 2017). The next criterion of selection is the variation of the sites in terms of Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER). In GER, Addis Ababa is the highest (94%), whereas

Oromia is the lowest (38.4%). With regards to Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) compared to other regions of the country still Addis Ababa is the second highest (79.5%) followed by Tigray regional state (93.6%). This is a striking figure when compared to Oromia's NER, which is 37% (Ministry of Education, 2017). Added to that, in Addis Ababa City Administration about 1000 ECCE centers are found in the region (Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2011/2012).

The ECCE program has been operational for a number of years (at least for a century); hence, compared to other regions, it is relatively matured (Lemma, 2014b). Besides, the private, public, government and faith-based centers seem evenly positioned across the sub-cities. In the city, different stakeholders own the program. The private sector (owned 75% preschools) took the lion share. The remaining institutions such as the public (8.5%), Government (7%), and others (9%) accounted for 25% (Lemma, 2014b). This condition has allowed exploring variations attributed to the leadership of the center. Additionally, the socio-economic situation, the demography, the geographic conditions, data accessibility, familiarity to the locations, and manageability were considered in choosing the sites.

### **3.5 Sampling Method and Participants**

As per the advice of a number of researchers (e.g., Bailie, 2012; Bøe & Hognestad, 2016; Dodge, 2011; Patton, 2002; Rababah, 2012; Tresnak, 2015; White, 2013) purposeful sampling technique is employed to recruit participants of the study. Specifically, informed by Hujala's (2004) and Patton's (2002) suggestions, in qualitative research the unit of analysis (in this case the ECCE leaders, ECCE experts, parents, and teachers) becomes the basis of purposeful sampling. Also Bailie (2012) argued that to explore, understand, and gain a great deal of information purposeful sampling is recommended. Dodge (2011) agrees with Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007). Hence, the technique allows me to select participants of the study and sites of the present study.

By employing a purposeful selection strategy (Bøe & Hognestad, 2017; Dodge, 2011) on each center's potential to add to the understanding of the processes of ECCE leadership, I chose six ECCE centers. Study participants are recruited from the immediate settings where the ECCE leaders work (Hujala, 2004) and from people surrounding the ECCE leaders including the ECCE leaders themselves. Morse (1994) also recommended 30-50 interviews for this sort of qualitative study. Polkinghorne (1989) (cited in Creswell et al., 2007, p.254) said interviewing "5 to 25 individuals" seem adequate to reach all the full understanding of the phenomenon. To address the purpose of the study the process of collecting sufficient and appropriate data accounts for "sampling adequacy" (Morse et al., 2002, p.9). As specified by Morse et al. (2000) sampling adequacy refers to data saturation, that "ensures replication in categories; replication verifies and ensures comprehension and completeness" (p.12).

In fact, in qualitative research, the sample size is not an important issue (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Njie & Asimiran, 2014). For instance, according to Braun and Clarke (2019) for thematic analysis 12 interviews or fewer could be sufficient to reach data saturation. This is because what matters is the depth and the richness of information obtained pertaining to the unit of analysis (ECCE leaders, ECCE experts, parents, and teachers) rather than the number of samples included (Njie & Asimiran, 2014; ). Njie and Asimiran (2014), quoting Kruger (1988) and Morse (1994) suggest that for a qualitative case study a sample of one individual could also be acceptable. Hence, as it is mentioned earlier, one could learn that the sample size is considered less important instead the focus is rather on the sample that gives the best and the most in-depth information that could be used as the researcher deem fit.

Thus, bearing in mind the advice given by qualitative researchers (e.g., Bøe & Hognestad, 2017; Kruger; 1988; Morse, 1994; Morse et al., 2002; Njie & Asimiran, 2014), a total of twenty-one participants (from three Government and three private ECCE centers, see Table 1) are recruited

for the present study. This is because to get relevant information and open up an opportunity to look for variations (if any) based on ownership. The rationale to use the small number of participants was due to its expensiveness and time consumption (Patten, 2005). In brief, one can conclude that qualitative researchers should deal with small samples, interact over a long period of time, and in great depth. Hence, based on the aforementioned arguments, like from the point of data saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2019), I believe that the proposed qualitative sample size sufficiently described the phenomenon under study. The subsequent Table 1 indicates the details of the study sites (the ECCE centers).

**Table 1: Number of Selected ECCE Centers**

Ser. No.	Region	Location	No. of Selected ECCE Centers		
			Gov't (O-class)	Private (Preschool)	Total
1	Addis Ababa	Urban		1	1
2		Urban	1		1
3	Oromia	Rural	1		1
4		Rural		1	1
5		Urban		1	1
6		Urban	1		1
Total	2		3	3	6

In the process of sample selection, primarily, six ECCE centers principals, on each center's potential to add to the understanding of the processes of ECCE leadership to collect holistic and in-depth data, were involved. This is because, to confront empirical reality, "qualitative researchers' often incorporate those who are studied to speak for themselves" (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p.6). Added to that, to gain richer insight and validate the data to be collected, people surrounding the ECCE center leader were chosen. To draw these participants, the current leadership position, having an ECCE work experience of at least five years is considered as a key participant's selection criteria. Besides, the frequency of their interaction with the leader, their work

relationships, and the chain of command are taken into account. Adding, data were also garnered from ECCE experts' working at the woreda level (see Table 2). Primarily, the use of varied participants from different career structures conferred a methodological strength than a single source (Patten, 2005). Besides, the types of empirical materials to be used and the proposed number of participants in corresponding sites are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Participants and Sites of the Study**

No	Participants	Instruments	Selection sites and number of participants			
			Oromia		Addis Ababa	Total
			Rural	Urban	Urban	
1	Woreda or sub-city education office (ECCE Expert)	Interview	1	1	1	3
2	ECCE Center Leaders		2	2	2	6
3	ECCE Teachers		2	2	2	6
4	ECCE Parents		2	2	2	6
	Total		7	7	7	21*

\*Indicates the total number of recruited interview participants

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study heavily depends on how samples are drawn (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Monette et al., 2005). Accordingly, participants included in the study were from diverse places ranging from the capital city of Ethiopia and Africa-Addis Ababa to a small town, and remote rural areas of the nation to entertain dissenting views. Moreover, that provides an opportunity to track participants who live with different life experiences and lifestyles. I made use of various sites and participants to assess how different participants respond in different settings. The common factor is working in ECCE institutions (currently employed at the selected preschool). The purpose was to establish an all-encompassing understanding of a group of ECCE principals, teachers, parents, and experts about the leadership of ECCE.

To become more concrete, the selected participant met the subsequent criteria to be involved in the study: (a) currently charged with leadership responsibilities (for the preschool principal, woreda ECCE experts, and the preschool PTSA), (b) experience of leading preschools for at least three years (for the school principals); and teachers a minimum of three years of teaching experience in the preschool; the time of four years is essential with regards to the knowledge and experience teachers would have gained from working with children, and (c) currently employed at the selected preschool.

### **3.6 Data Collection Methods**

In order to collect the required data for the study, I have used three techniques of data collection: individual semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. A semi-structured interview was the dominantly employed tool of the data collection. While using a semi-structured interview as my principal data collection tool, I have considered the relative merits over other qualitative techniques due to the nature of the study. I believe that participants in this study are broadly represented the early childhood field at the micro-level in Ethiopia.

Informed by previous empirical studies (e.g., Berger, 2015; Fetene, 2008), I made use of multiple data collection methods that are employed: interview, document review, and observation. This combination of qualitative data collection methods offers an opportunity of looking at issues in the natural setting (Astalin, 2013). Said differently, organic and detailed data on the practices of the ECCE leadership is generated (White, 2013). Descriptions of the three data collection methods are given below.

#### ***3.6.1 Interview***

As per the advice of some empirical studies (e.g., Turner, 2010; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010), I used individual interviews as the main data-gathering instrument of the study.

This provides data that are inaccessible through observation (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). It could also help me establish rapport and obtain detailed information (Paterson, Bottorff, & Hewat, 2003; Turner, 2010) about the leadership in ECCE. With regards to this, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) argue that interview combines both verbal and nonverbal communication. Specifically, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) described that to generate a better understanding of the issue under consideration “nonverbal communication (e.g., facial expression, hand gesture) clarifies the meaning of words spoken, and words clarify the meaning of nonverbal communication” (p. 699).

Besides, as per the advice of Patten (2005), the process of questioning is characterized by its flexibility rather than rigidity. For instance, too concise responses are enriched by probing questions (Al-Omari, 2011; Patten, 2005). The interview guiding questions are prepared in English. Nevertheless, after translation, the interviews are conducted in one of the two languages (Amharic or Afan Oromo) based on their convenience to express ideas well, recorded (upon their consent), and “transcribed verbatim” (Thorgren & Omoredede, 2015, p.8). Discussions are conducted in the preferred sites of the participants (most often in the ECCE center compounds or offices). In an attempt to better elicit information and uncover the interviewee’s true positions, about two hours were used with each of the interviewee’s and the discussions are recorded upon their agreements (Fetene, 2009).

Five sets of interview guide questions are used to record the status of ECCE leadership in the study sites. The first interview guide containing four items were set to capture data on the leadership assignment of the ECCE leaders. The second interview guide comprising five items were included to elicit information about the leadership behavior of ECCE leaders. In the third interview guide, the applicability of OCB was tapped through five interview items. Four items that sought to know about the employment of pedagogical leadership were incorporated under the fourth interview guide. And, the fifth interview guide containing four items enabled me to tap data

on the challenges that may hinder the proper operation of the ECCE leadership. In general, the five sets of interview guide questions are semi-structured. What is more, the entire semi-structured interview guide questions are open-ended to allow flexibility in capturing informants' stories and encounters. In each interview, a similar series of questions are posed to the interviewees.

With the informed consent of participants, I have audiotaped the interviews. Accordingly, from the mixture of private and public ECCE centers a diverse group of participants such as six ECCE leaders, from the people surrounding the ECCE center leaders, six veteran ECCE teachers, who have served at least for five years, and an interview with six parents (one from each ECCE center) took place. Additionally, three woreda ECCE experts are interviewed (a complete list, 'pseudonyms' of the interviewees are indicated in Chapter 4). I have encouraged interviewees to speak openly (not for attribution) and expressed a wide range of perspectives consistent with their varied experiences, backgrounds, and viewpoints. Then, regardless of any dissenting views, interviewees' responses coalesced around themes (perhaps) in several key areas. In doing so, I hope these data might address how colleagues or companions perceive and view the status of their immediate leaders' leadership practices from the point of the current study key questions.

Since the interview is the major data-gathering instrument of the study, informed by Turner's (2010) suggestions for conducting qualitative interviews, I have taken care of its implementation. For example, I have followed the following procedures: a) remained as neutral as possible; b) reached participants with all necessary respect c) created a friendly environment d) sometimes I checked the audio recorder; e) asked one question at a time; f) when participants moved out of the track I have politely and systematically reminded them to stick to the point of discussions; g) encouraged response with occasional signs of non-verbal (e.g., nodding head) and with verbal communications.

### ***3.6.2 Observation***

In the qualitative investigation, another important data gathering approach is observation. According to White (2013) combining observation with other methods of data collection instruments allows for a comprehensive view of leadership in ECCE for example. In line with this, quoting Hammersley (1990), Paterson et al. noted, “to rely on what people say about what they believe and do, without also observing what they do, is to neglect the complex relationship between attitudes and behavior” ( pp.3-4). In other words, observation of how ECCE leaders interact with their compatriots was held.

Besides, for the purpose of triangulation (Che & Trent, 2006; Lee & Krauss, 2015; Olsen, 2004) and to reveal the “backstage realities” (Paterson et al., 2003, p.4) of the phenomena that could be concealed through discussions or failed to be documented, therefore, I conducted some observations.

For instance, among other things, the process of my observation includes the child-friendliness of the ECCE environment, how children of the center are cared for and or educated, the relationship between the ECCE leader and the remaining staff members, and the practiced pedagogical orientation is observed for about a semester. In doing that, twofold benefits are obtained: first, as suggested by Lee and Krauss (2015), the credibility of the present study is maintained; second, sufficient empirical materials are garnered.

### ***3.6.3 Document Review***

Although interviews are the primary method of data collection, I have also reviewed documents. Document analysis is used to elucidate or argue participants’ perspectives (Hatch 2002), and to afford a thick description of the case (Fetene; 2009; Lee, 2016). Documents are among the useful empirical materials that help garner rich sources of secondary data from the ECCE centers (Davis, 2012). Thus, I have consulted schedules (time table, exam, school calendar,

co-curricular), preschool minutes (e.g., preschool management, PTA, teacher association, co-curricular activities, and different committees), reports (daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annual), parent communication books, students exercise books, mark lists, preschool brochures or leaflets (if any), booklets (monthly or annual, if any), photographs, and videos (if any).

Besides, to get additional information national and regional ECCE policy documents and ECCE guidelines are consulted. Added to that, students mark list, preschool minutes, class schedules, and preschool reports of the past three years are documented. The documents are selected based on the expected contribution via the eyes of the researcher as it may be related to the purpose of the study. The semi-structured questions are utilized to conduct the discussions.

### **3.7 Data Collection Process**

Informed by Janesick (1994) places, persons, and events are described to form categories, themes, and patterns from the garnered data. Six ECCE centers found in rural and urban areas in Oromia and Addis Ababa are selected purposively. The selection of varying locations allowed me to gain a broader perspective on the leadership of ECCE. Besides, a total of 21 participants (six directors with a minimum of three years' experience, six ECCE teachers with a minimum of three years' experience, six parents who are members of the parents' committee, and three ECCE experts) belonging to six ECCE centers are chosen with purposeful sampling method and were interviewed.

Interviews were undertaken following the pre-interview and during the interview protocols described in the preceding sections. Each interview was made at the participant's chosen location (e.g., principal's office, staff room, classrooms, and in the free spaces of the preschool compound frequently under the tree) and at their convenient time. The interviews were conducted after school, whereas the preschool observations took place during school hours; the observations were held for a period of two to three hours with each school. Twenty-one hours and 12 minutes is the total time

spent interviewing participants of the study. The interviews were employed from September 22, 2019, to February 5, 2020.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

An inductive reasoning or an inductive method of data analysis has been employed. The current multisite qualitative case study was organized on the basis of the five basic research questions. The data from semi-structured interviews, observations, and document reviews are analyzed systematically. The data gathered are organized, classified, and edited to construct a case record. Next, the constructed case story is presented thematically (Argyropoulou, 2013; Fetene, 2009). The process of data transcription, analyses, and interpretations are carried out concurrently on a daily basis along with the task of data collection (Morse et al., 2002). Then, through content analysis, the data were coded, classified into themes, and discussed (Rahbari, Hajnaghizadeh, Damari, 2015). Through intensive reading and rereading of each interview, notes from observation, and photographs, words, phrases, and concepts that repeat themselves are identified.

Specifically, translating the audio-taped data allowed me to internalize the data and simplified my job of theme formation. Data analysis involved listening and analyzing the tape recordings reading the interview transcripts and observational field notes several times (Bøe & Hognestad, 2017). Then the data is coded and categorized based on the possible themes generated from the data. Put differently, at this point, I have reached the stage of connoisseurship or familiarize myself with the key issues from the data. To explore participants' responses a content analysis is employed to group similar ideas gathered on the same issue (Argyropoulou, 2013; Halttunen, 2013). A cross-case analysis was also utilized to group similar ideas gathered from participants on the same issue (Patten, 2005).

The five guiding research questions are utilized to frame the general format of the study in the process of developing themes, categories, and patterns, which emerge from the data. In other

words, using codes that are grouped into categories based on patterns and the categories are merged to form/identify themes. Finally, data from observation and document reviews are compared and synchronized to the data from the interviews.

### **3.9 Validation Strategies**

To reduce the impact of bias on the data collected, several validation strategies are employed to document the accuracy and value of the study (Cho & Trent, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Morse et al., 2002). Methodological coherence, appropriateness of the samples, collecting and analyzing data concurrently, and thinking theoretically were carried out as I undertake the study. The approach offered me an opportunity to evaluate and propose a timely correction and ascertain the way forward. A prolonged field engagement and the triangulation of data sources are used to establish credibility (Lee, 2016). From my observations, a thick description of each participant is constructed to help readers determine the transferability of the research. Dependability of the study is established through peer review by another researcher (one of my colleagues) trained in qualitative analysis throughout the research process. Additionally, member checks data analyses, interpretations, and conclusions are conducted to argue the credibility of the study.

### **3.10 Statement of Reflexivity**

As a qualitative researcher, I have attempted to conduct this study in a professional and unbiased way. Based on the roles to be played by a qualitative researcher I have approached the study via the lens of constructivist paradigm assumptions (Palaganas et al., 2017). I also adopted the role of facilitator, interviewer, observer, recorder, and interpreter. During the data collection process, I was keen and sensitive in both interviewing, recording, and observing the phenomena as faithfully as possible. During interviews and observations, I hope my prior professional experience of the issue under investigation assisted me to understand the participants' subtle meanings without

much effort. This made me easily grasp their concern and put myself in the position of the interviewees and, thus, I fully acknowledged their concerns.

I have reflected on my biases of the research topic and assumptions of the outcomes of the study before and during the research to maintain as impartial of a position as possible often with the use of analytic memos (Holmes, 2020; Patnaik, 2013). I have personally reflected on each occasion of contact and communication with the participants. I have also structured the research question and probing questions in such a way that were not led or guided the participant's responses in a predetermined direction. In doing so, I strove to challenge the inherent inter-subjectivity in a qualitative study (Holmes, 2020; Patnaik, 2013).

Cognizant of my contribution to planning, collecting, analyzing the empirical materials of the present study; I have organized and reported the findings of this study as bias-free as possible. Most importantly, in the process of constructing meaning, it is impossible to be an outsider. This does not mean that qualitative researchers shy away from keeping an objective position, rather, it is to signify the researcher's active involvement in the research process. In connection with this, Palaganas et al. (2017) noted that qualitative researchers are part of the social world they study. By way of illustration, in every step, I walked, from the inception to the completion of the present study I have attempted to keep a neutral viewpoint as necessary as possible. Throughout this study, I reminded myself to remain an instrument of the study by focusing on what participants said and what I observed by suspending my personal preconceptions and biases (Palaganas et al., 2017). As a whole, I was very much considerate in the decision that was made at each stage of the research process to improve the trustworthiness of this study (Dowling & Given, 2008).

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

Experiences and research findings depict that the need for ethical consideration in research activity is of paramount importance. Numerous studies (e.g., Bøe, Hognestad, & Waniganayake,

2016; Palaganas et al., 2017) are in consensus to indicate that research ethics is the moral commitment that scientists are required to make the search for truth and knowledge imperative. Particularly, in social science research, ethical issues are needed to minimize the potential harms of the informants while maximizing the quality of the research. As reported by Bøe et al. (2016), ethical consideration includes informed consent, voluntary participation, respect for privacy, safeguarding anonymity and confidentiality, and accuracy of the reports and results.

In this regard, informants are not forced to participate in the study and have a right to remain anonymous. Besides, I gave adequate information for all informants to take part in the processes of data gathering. Specifically, informants of the interview were informed about the details and purposes of this study before they started responding to the questions. Likewise, the reason why they are chosen and to be asked would be clarified in advance.

Furthermore, care was taken not to include sensitive questions that could cause participants embarrassment or discomfort. Confidentiality with regard to responses and the reporting of results are also uncovered to the participants before disclosed to the research audience. With the informed consent of participants, I have audiotaped all the interview discussions. However, I have taken the precaution to maintain the anonymity of my participants. Once I completed transcribing the audiotaped data, I have destroyed all the tapes and immediately change all the names of the participants with pseudonyms. Yet, I may not, change the name of the preschools where I would conduct the study as it may help improve the practices of the vicinity with regards to the leadership of ECCEs. Besides, I have taken pictures from observations based on the prior permission of the gatekeepers and participants. Finally, for accuracy and privacy checks the empirical materials were disclosed to the informants of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This Chapter presents and analyses data from the various tools. The purpose of this study is to seek insights into the problem of leadership in ECCE centers in the Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa city administration of the Federal government of Ethiopia. In Chapter 3, the particular research strategy and methods chosen for this study are described and justified in harmony with the purpose of the study and the research questions. Consistent with the data analysis protocol presented in Chapter 3, the analysis of raw data obtained from the interview, observation, and document review are reported through identification and accompanying explanations of emerging themes as results. An overview of the data collection process and the research sites as well as the profile of the participants shall be described first to be followed by a discussion of the research findings.

#### 4.1 Results

##### *4.1.1 The Research Sites*

Data was collected from six ECCE sites found in Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa city administration. As described in Chapter 3, all of the six centers met the following criteria: (a) ownership (private preschools or government O-classes), (b) duration of the center (a center which has served for at least five years), (c) availability of ECCE teachers with the minimum experience of five years, and (d) medium of instruction.

Pseudonyms were used to safeguard identities of the ECCE centers selected for the study: *Selam, Enat, Fikir, Tesfa, Abdi, and Hunde*. Given here below are specific details of the study sites:

**Selam:** Selam is a private preschool established in 2013. The preschool is chosen for it belongs to an urban site (Addis Ababa City Administration). It is one of three preschools owned by an

investor with little experience in education. The nursery school caters to 456 children. The rented preschool size is about 750m<sup>2</sup>(it is one of the narrowest preschools found in the city). The preschool is staffed with 26 employees (a director, ten teachers; ten assistant teachers, three janitors, and two guards). Amharic is the medium of instruction through which five subjects, namely Amharic, English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, and Aesthetics are taught for Nursery, Lower KG, as well as Upper KG students.

**Enat:** Enat is an ‘O-class’ center attached to primary school. The preschool has been operational for eleven years. It is chosen for it belongs to an urban site (in Oromia regional state). The preschool hosts 320 children in an area of about 950 m<sup>2</sup>. The center had six full-time employees (four teachers and two janitors). The principal of the primary school (1-8) is also the director of the preschool unit. Amharic is the medium of instruction through which subjects such as Amharic, English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, and Aesthetics are offered.

**Fikir:** Fikir is an ‘O-class’ center attached to the government primary school. It has been operating for the last eight years. The preschool is chosen for it belongs to one of the rural sites in Oromia regional state. It is confined to a narrow space with an area of 850m<sup>2</sup> compound. The center caters to 206 children with its two full-time teachers. Amharic, Afan Oromo, English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, and Aesthetics are the subjects offered for two groups of children organized in accordance with the medium of instruction. The first group of 75 children attends their lessons in Amharic while the remaining group of 131 children attends in Afan Oromo.

**Tesfa:** Tesfa is a private preschool found in Adama city administration of the regional state of Oromia. The preschool, which has been operational for the last ten and half years, is situated in an affluent area and, therefore, rich in learning resources. It is privately owned, and governed with a monthly payment of 550 birr collected from each student. The preschool caters to 389 children within the confinement of a narrow space that has an area of 900 m<sup>2</sup> compound. It is staffed with 14

individuals (a director, nine teachers; nine assistant teachers, three janitors, and two guards).

Amharic is the medium of instruction through which subjects such as Amharic, English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, and Aesthetics are offered in the various levels of the preschool.

**Abdi:** Abdi is an ‘O-class’ center attached to primary school (1-6). It was established in 2014. The preschool is selected for it belongs to rural site (Oromia regional state). The preschool is situated in an area of 10,000m<sup>2</sup>. It is staffed with thirteen individuals (a director, ten teachers; one ECCE facilitator, and a guard). Afan Oromo is the medium of instruction. Amharic, English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, and Aesthetics subjects are offered to a group of 31 O-class children.

**Hunde:** Hunde is a private preschool is established in 1969. It is one of the oldest preschools found in Addis Ababa. It operates under the auspices of the primary and secondary school administration of the institution, but it has had a separate campus and a principal of its own. The center caters to 421 children within an area of about 8000m<sup>2</sup> and a staff of 32 employees (a director, twelve teachers; twelve assistant teachers, four janitors, and three guards). Amharic is the medium of instruction through which the subjects Amharic, English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, and Aesthetics are taught to the children enrolled in the various levels of the preschool.

#### ***4.1.2 Participant Profiles***

In this section, the profile of the key informants is described. All participants are given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. The profiles of the participant school leaders are summarized in Table 3. Table 4 shows teacher participants’ personal data, whereas, Table 5 presents the profiles of the interviewed parents and the ECCE experts.

**4.1.2.1 Early Childhood Care and Education Leader Participant Profiles.** In this subsection, background information of each ECCE center leader participant is concisely presented. As indicated earlier, the names given are not real:

**Yanet:** Yanet, 30, is a female private preschool principal who works in the urban site. She holds a diploma in Human Resource Management from Harambe University College-a private college. Besides, she had also a relevant certificate (preschool teaching) from Alpha University College (another private institution) during the turn of the Ethiopian millennium in 2008. She assumed the leadership position because she had had teaching experience and the school owner appointed her. She has six years of work experience in the position. She earns a 4500 ETB salary and a position top-up of 2000 ETB per-month. She is married and a mother of one.

**Tilahun:** Tilahun is a 34 years old urban-based private preschool principal. He has worked as a principal for the last eight years. He had three credentials including Civil Engineering from Rift Valley University (a private institution) in 2013 and a secured ECCE diploma from Wisdom College in 2005. He has also secured another diploma in mathematics education from Asella Teachers College in 2014. His monthly salary is 4500 ETB. He also earns a position top-up of 2000 ETB per-month. Tilahun assumed the position on the basis of merit-based competition (exam, interview, the strength of the CV).

**Bikila:** Bikila, 35, is one of the government primary schools principal found in the rural site of Oromia regional state. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Educational Planning and Management from Addis Ababa University in 2015. Prior to that, he obtained a diploma in social science education from Muger Private College. He currently administers the “O”-class center attached to his primary school. Out of a total of 16 years of work experience, he has served as a principal for a period of five years. His monthly salary is 6809 ETB. He assumed the leadership position based on open competition. He is married and a father of two.

**Tirunesh:** Tirunesh is a 42 years old female primary school principal. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Educational Planning and Management from Dire Dawa University in 2015. She has a total of 25 years of work experience. She spent 12 years of school principalship in diverse primary schools; she had five years of work experience in the current primary school. She runs the urban-based government O-class center along with the primary school. She assumed the principal-ship position via a competition organized by the woreda education office. Her salary is one of the highest of all of the participants sampled for the study with her 8539 ETB monthly salary. She is a married woman with three children.

**Olyad:** Olyad is the youngest of the participants, male and 28; he even looks younger than his age. In spite of that, he is quite articulate and confident of himself and his ideas. He obtained his first degree in Biology from Haramaya University in 2016. He leads one of the rural-based government primary schools found in Oromia regional state. He has had seven years of work experience in the school leadership position after a competition organized by the woreda Education office three years back. He also leads the “O-class” center attached to the primary school. His monthly salary is 6809 ETB.

**Yeshihareg:** Yeshihareg, 56, is a private preschool principal found in urban center. She is a mother of four children and had a total of 35 years of work experience. She obtained Teachers Training Certificate (TTI) from the then Bahirdar TTC in 1981 and a diploma in Amharic from St. Mary University College in 2009. She was eventually appointed by the owner of the preschool to be in charge of the preschool, six years back. Her monthly basic salary is 8000 ETB.

As indicated in Table 3, the number of female principals is quite proportional to that of the male principals, three each. Their age ranges from 28-56 years and participants had a minimum of six years of work experience. Their salary ranges from 4500 ETB to 8539. Regarding educational achievement, they have diverse qualifications (from diploma to Bachelor degrees of varied characteristics). Out of the six principals, four of them secured their bachelor/first degrees

(Biology, Educational Planning and Management, and Civil Engineering), the remaining two principals obtained a diploma in Human Resource Management and in Language studies (Majoring Amharic language). Besides, half the number of principals graduated at least in two fields of study including ECCE certificate, teachers training certificate (TTI), and a diploma in mathematics education. Their term of employment is permanent.

**Table 3: Summary of ECCE Leader Participant Profiles**

ECCE Center	Participant's name (Pseudonyms)	Sex	Age	Field of study	Position	Experience (in years)		Salary	Term of employment
						Current job	Total		
Selam	Yanet	F	30	HRM Diploma & ECCE Certificate	Principal	6	6	4500	Permanent
Enat	Tilahun	M	34	ECCE Diploma, Math Diploma, Civil Engineering,	Principal	8	8	4500	Permanent
Fikir	Bikila	M	35	BA, EdPM	Principal	5	16	6809	Permanent
Tesfa	Tirunesh	F	42	BA, EdPM	Principal	5	25	8539	Permanent
Abdi	Olyad	M	28	BA in Biology	Principal	7	11	6809	Permanent
Hunde	Yeshihareg	F	56	Teachers Training Institute (TTI) and Diploma in Amharic Language	Principal	6	35	8,000	Permanent

**4.1.2.2 Teacher Participant Profiles.** In this sub-section, the background information of each teacher participant is concisely presented. As indicated earlier, the names given are not real:

**Liya:** Liya, 32, is a teacher employed by a privately owned preschool. She graduated with ECCE Certificate and an Accounting Diploma from St. Mary University and Sub-Sahara University College, respectively. She also obtained two certificates: in cookery and masonry work. Liya is married and a mother of two children. She is near the end of her 15th year of work experience at times of the present study. Six of those years are spent in teaching UKG children, at

this particular preschool. Currently, she takes care of 45 children as a full-time teacher and earns 3000 ETB a month. In brief, she is quite an eloquent and passionate participant.

**Sara:** Sara is 49 years old, married, and a mother of four children. She has been teaching in different preschools for the last two decades. She obtained Teachers Training Institute (TTI) certificate 21 years back; it qualifies her to teach at the first cycle primary school (1-4) level. Currently, she teaches 65 children in her UKG class with a monthly salary of only 1400 ETB (one of the lowest salary) from her temporary employer. Even though she has been complaining about the amount of salary paid to the position, one can see her commitment from what she tells. She is also very enthusiastic and expressive; she had always something to say on nearly any of the issues raised.

**Kedija:** Kedija, aged 30, is a female teacher with nine years of preschool teaching experience. She has five years of teaching “O”-class children in this particular school. Prior to this preschool, she had four years of teaching experience as an assistant teacher. Kedija is married and a mother of two children. She was employed as a facilitator (a preschool teacher for the “O”-class children) after she failed to pass the grade 10 EGSCE (Ethiopian General Secondary School Certificate Examination). She secured her ECCE certificate from St. Mary College in 2016. She teaches 75 children (Amharic speakers) of the center in a single classroom. Kedija also told me that (I have also paid a visit) 131 Afan Oromo speaking children are also placed in a single classroom (her colleague’s /Ayantu/class). Kedija is paid a contractual payment of 1370 ETB per month for the position. The payment is one of the lowest from the participants of the present study.

**Genet:** Genet is one of the veteran preschool teachers. She is 36 years old. Since she has been there longer than her other eight colleagues, she is more familiar with the preschool. She graduated with a diploma in ECCE from Mimosa College in 2004. Out of her total teaching

experience of 14 years, six of those years are spent in this particular preschool. During the data collection time of this study, fifty-six children were studying in her LKG classroom. She is also among the low-paid preschool teachers with a salary of 2000 ETB. She is married and a mother of four children. With regards to her overall communication skills though not as articulate as Liya, she talks so bluntly about the leadership of ECCE.

**Hana:** Hana is the youngest teacher of all of the participants; she is 24 years old and single. Hana held a diploma in ECCE five years ago from Asella College of Teachers Education. Since then she has been teaching in this preschool with a permanent salary of 2100 ETB. Compared to other participants, she stated that she is much more comfortable working in preschools. She is very critical and to the point when reacting to the interview questions. She is also quite confident and enthusiastic about having an independent and trained ECCE leader. She has been facilitating the job of the center for 31 LKG children.

**Tiyu:** Tiyu, who is 35 years old, is employed in a preschool that is owned and sponsored by a religious institution. She has been teaching at the preschool for just over five years with a diploma in ECCE. She has 12 years of teaching experience and earns a monthly salary of 2600 ETB. Tiyu teaches thirty-five children in her nursery class and she is pleased with the class-size. Tiyu is apparently the least articulate of all the participants; however, if she does not understand a question posed, she does not hesitate to ask for an explanation.

**Table 4: Summary of Teacher Participant Profiles**

Participant's name (Pseudonyms)	Sex	Age	Field of study	Position	Experience (in years)		Salary	Term of employment
					Current job	Total		
Liya	F	32	ECCE Certificate & Accounting Diploma	Teacher	6	15	3000	Permanent
Sara	F	49	TTI Certificate	Teacher	21	21	2000	Permanent
Kedija	F	30	Grade 10 & ECCE certificate	Teacher	5	9	1370	Contractual
Genet	F	36	ECCE Certificate & HRM Diploma	Teacher	6	14	2000	Permanent
Hana	F	24	ECCE Diploma	Teacher	5	5	2100	Permanent
Tiyu	F	35	ECCE Diploma	Teacher	5	12	2600	Permanent

**4.1.2.3 Parent and expert participant profiles.** In this sub-section, background information of each parent participant is concisely presented. As specified earlier, the names given are pseudonyms:

**Parents.** The involvement of parents as a participant of the study “allows for a full, in-depth, and trustworthy account of the case” (Rule & John, 2011, p. 64). To this end, a total of six parents were purposively selected and interviewed (four of them are females) from private and public based ECCE centers found in rural and urban areas of the Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa City Administration.

The selection of varying locations allowed the researcher to gain a broader perspective of the ECCE leaders. Out of these six parents, three of them were members of the Parent-Teacher Students Association (PTSA) of the preschools under the study. The interview was made with their

full consent and took 30 to 45 minutes' duration. A good rapport between the participating parents and the researcher was established to ease and normalize the data collection effort.

Here below is a brief description of their profile:

Admasu was a parent teacher association (PTA) chair with three years of work experience in the position at Selam preschool. He was retired and had had a diploma in Forestry from Wondo-Genet College of Forestry and Natural Resources. Halima, 25, was a housewife and a mother of two children. One of her children has been attending her classes at Enat preschool. Diribe was a married woman and a mother of three children. Her first-born male child aged seven, has been attending his "O"- class at Fikir ECCE center. Abebe, the 44 years old merchant, who had completed grade 12 in 2001, sent two children (one at UKG and the second from Nursery) at Tesfa preschool. Workinesh was a 42 years old English teacher who was appointed and working as a member of PTSA for the last two years at Abdi preschool. She obtained Bachelor's degree in English and she had been teaching in different schools for two and a half decades. Finally, Gadise, 32, was the only nurse parent participant included in the study. She has been serving as a member of PTSA at Hunde preschool. She has a daughter attending at LKG of the preschool.

**Experts.** A total of three experts were interviewed (one is female, Emebet). All of the participants (Emebet, Mohammed, and Kebebew) had at least five years' of work experience as an ECCE expert. None of the experts graduated with ECCE or in any discipline of specialization related to children, but they graduated in the fields of education (EdPM and Biology). In terms of age, all of them (the experts) were found in their forties. The interview was conducted based on their full consent and took about an hour. The following Table 5 summarizes the parent and expert participants' profile.

**Table 5: Summary of Parent and Expert Participant Profiles**

Participant's name (Pseudonyms)	Sex	Age	Field of study	Current role	Experience (in years)		Salary	Personal Job
					Curr ent job	Tot al		
Admasu	M	63	Diploma in Forestry	PTSA chairman	-	-	-	Agricultural expert
Halima	F	25	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Parent	-	-	-	House wife
Diribe	F	34	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Parent	-	-	-	House wife
Abebe	M	43	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Parent	-	-	-	Merchant
Workinesh	F	42	BA in English	PTSA member	25	25	6809	Teacher
Gadise	F	32	Nursing	PTSA member	-	-	-	Nurse
Emebet	F	43	BA in Biology	ECCE Expert	6	24	7647	Education Expert
Mohammed	M	44	MA, EdPM	ECCE Expert	5	21	8539	Education Expert
Kebebew	M	46	BA, EdPM	ECCE Expert	7	26	9000	Education Expert

#### ***4.1.3 The Key Themes that Emerged from the Analysis of Data***

The data collected with the help of various data-gathering devices, such as interview, observation, and document review were inductively and deductively analyzed towards answering the research questions: a) how center level ECCE leaders' engage in the practices of ECCE in Ethiopia; b) leadership behaviors commonly exhibited in ECCE centers; c) the extent to which ECCE center level leaders attempt to cultivate early childhood and care teachers' OCB; d) pedagogical leadership employed in ECCE centers, and e) challenges faced by ECCE center level leaders in their day-to-day activities in the study sites.

As indicated in Chapter 3, the data collected is repeatedly reviewed and the researcher sorted, coded, and categorized based on the basic questions set. Accordingly, subthemes were generated, organized, and reorganized; patterns were observed, compared, and contrasted. In each section, the

subthemes identified from the interview transcriptions and quotes are presented. Table 6, below, describes the developed subthemes:

**Table 6: The Emerged Subthemes of the Study**

Basic Research Questions	Topics	Subthemes	Method/s of Data Analysis
#1. How do ECCE leaders engage in the practices of ECCE in Ethiopia?	1. ECCE leaders assignment	1.1 The primary school principals (leaders of the ECCE center) 1.2 Appointment (owners goodwill and competition) 1.3 Females as preferred ECCE leader	Inductive
#2. What leadership behavior is commonly exhibited in ECCE centers in Ethiopia?	2. The Leadership Behavior of ECCE Leaders	2.1 Telling (Directing) 2.2 Participatory 2.3 Selling (Coaching) 2.4 Delegating (Empowering) 2.5 Caring leadership	Acombination of both (deductive and inductive)
#3. To what extent do the ECCE leaders cultivate early childhood teachers' organizational citizenship behavior?	3. Organizational citizenship behavior in ECCE leadership	3.1 ECCE center teachers OCB 3.2 ECCE center leaders OCB	Inductive
#4. How is pedagogical leadership employed in ECCE centers?	4. The Employment of Pedagogical Leadership in ECCE Centers	4.1 Professionalism 4.1.1 The active learning pedagogy 4.1.2 Playfulness of the learning environment 4.1.3 The merger of "O"-class children of different ages	Inductive
#5. What challenges do ECCE leaders face in effectively operating ECCE in Ethiopia?	5. Challenges of Leadership in ECCE	5.1.1 The employment of foreign curriculum 5.1.2 The inadequate supply of suitable ECCE books 5.1.3 Lack of child-friendly assessment mechanisms	Inductive
	5.1 Pedagogical challenges		
	5.2 Administrative challenges		
	5.3 Structural challenges	5.3.1 An independent ECCE leader 5.3.2 Weak and intermittent relationship	
	5.4 Attitudinal challenges	5.4.1 Failure to trust the home-made ECCE curriculum 5.4.2 Flimsy government attention 5.4.3 Insufficient parental engagement in the ECCE program	

#### ***4.1.4 Early Childhood Education Leaders' Assignment***

The assignment of ECCE center leadership has been a matter of concern for individuals who have a stake over the issue. The need for a safe, child-friendly, and conducive learning environment has hit the top agenda to understand the merits of people who assume the leadership position. Particularly, the substantial roles of ECCE leaders in creating an environment, which could change the lives of children for the better largely, held the attention of participants of the study. The assignment/appointment practice of individuals to the leadership position at ECCE centers was explored through the question: How do leaders assume the leadership position in early childhood education centers? Given the consistency of replies collected, their ideas can be summarized into the following two sub-themes: (a) the primary school principals (the default leaders of the ECCE center) and (b) appointment (owners' goodwill). The details are given hereunder:

**4.1.4.1 The Primary School Principals.** The primary school principal is the default leader of the ECCE center. The ECCE center is led by default or by the rule of the thumb. Since the government "O-class" centers are attached to the primary schools their administration system also falls under the authority of the primary school principals. A review of ECCE documents of the Ministry of Education (e.g., MoE, 2010; MoE, 2013a; MoE, 2013b; TGE, 1994; ESDP I-V) gives inadequate information on how an ECCE center leader should be identified, recruited, assigned, and or fired.

Documents consulted shed little light on the recruitment of ECCE leaders, in contrast to issues pertaining to teachers or facilitators, parents, children, and other stakeholders. Among the reviewed policy documents in 2013, the *National Professional Standard for School Principals* and the unpublished National Curriculum Framework for the Postgraduate Diploma in School

Leadership of the Ministry of Education actually stipulated the following criteria: a) five years of teaching experience, b) qualification of first degree for the primary school and an MA or MSc holder for secondary school is required in any teaching discipline. Besides, a result-based performance appraisal (the result of job evaluation), interview, and written exam are considered as key criteria (MoE, 2013a; MoE, 2013b).

It appears that the above mentioned primary and secondary school principals' assignment criteria are merit-based, open, and transparent. The government primary school principal participants (Tirunesh, Bikila, and Olyad) and the three expert participants (Emebet, Mohammed, and Kebebew) of the study also confirmed it. One of the female principal participants named Tirunesh, for example, noted:

Principals are assigned based on competition. The position is advertised by the woreda Education office. If you are interested in the vacant position and fulfill at least the following criteria, such as a minimum of five years of teaching experience, first-degree qualification in any field of teaching, and job efficiency results you will get the position aspired. If you pass the first phase of the competition, you will sit for a written exam, and finally, the principal selection committee of the woreda education office will interview you. If you ask me, I have experienced this screening procedure. With regards to coordination of the ECCE center, even though nothing is written in black and white in my job descriptions, I am responsible for the operation of the program undertaken by the preschool.

The above statement illustrates the extent to which the philosophy of professionalism pertaining to the leadership assignment of the ECCE center is de-professionalized. All of the public principal participants and woreda ECCE expert participants were in a sharp consensus; they revealed that in the process of primary school principals assignment, where ECCE centers are also

included, no relevant measuring instrument( interview questions and/or written exam, for example) is incorporated to identify ECCE leaders. Evidently, the primary school principals are entitled to lead or they are the default leaders of the ECCE centers as the center is attached to the primary schools. There is a convergence of opinion among participants on the same, however. For instance, Olyad, one of the primary school leaders, stated the following:

I assumed the leadership position of this school on the basis of competition, some six years ago. Very recently, I have competed for the second time with almost the same criteria and maintained the position. However, during my two terms competition, I did not come up with a single point of competition, which referred to the ECCE center management. Frankly speaking, in my second term competition which is held this year (September 2019) I expected to see some questions on ECCE; but I did not come across such relevant questions in the written exam or in the interview.

In relation to this, Bikila recounts an anecdote of how he came to the current position: My leadership journey is associated with the competency of my teaching experience. In 2014, I won the ‘best teacher’ award of the year from the primary school teachers of the woreda. Following the recognition, I have been granted a scholarship to attend an undergraduate program at Addis Ababa University (BA degree in EdPM). After graduation, I have applied for the position of primary school principal-ship. When I succeeded in performing well in the test and the interview based on the selection criteria, I was selected and assigned to lead the primary school. I am also leading the “O”-class center.

As briefly noted above, the leadership assignment of the ECCE center seems to be sidelined. The primary school principals are selected to lead the primary school. Nonetheless, the ECCE center is led by the default or by rule of the thumb. This is corroborated by what Kebebew,

an MA holder ECCE expert, has pointed out in response to the question of leadership assignment guidelines:

One of the key school position is principalship. This is because, in order to realize the vision, mission, and core values of the school, the competency of a person assigned as principal is crucial. Therefore, during the principal selection process, the education office uses guidelines for school principal selection and assignment. There are some criteria to be met by the contestants. For instance, experience, qualification, performance appraisal, and exam and interview are among the fundamental parameters of the competition. Often, if the principal position is vacant or if the term of the existing principal is completed, the position is advertised. Teachers, supervisors, or other experts who have a teaching and or an educational leadership background can compete for the position. Females and EdPM graduates are also encouraged for the position. The qualified employee will be assigned to lead both the primary school and the ECCE center. In respect of the ECCE center, the primary school principals consider it as one of their roles and responsibilities and they are accounted for the overall operation of the system.

In contrast, one of the public ECCE center teacher participants, Hana, noted that regardless of the official principal's assignment criteria, political affiliation, network, and nepotism were the widely employed approaches of principals' appointment.

What I want to add is we need to have a preschool leader, who 'knows' the nitty-gritty of ECCE or a skillful and knowledgeable individual about the subsector. I mean one who is capable to support teachers. Besides, a competent leader who is good at technical, human, and conceptual skills is of paramount importance. The assignment of leaders let alone at this school, elsewhere in the country, needs to be based on performance, competence, and

experience. However, political affiliation, network, and nepotism are found to be the order of the day; in fact, it is practiced beyond the curtain.

Workinesh, a veteran English teacher at Abdi, who represents the PTSA, shared Hana's view. She calls political affiliation, network, and nepotism the 'unwritten rules'. Having a look at what Hana and Workinesh have said verbatim may give us a robust understanding of their reactions. Alike Hana, this is what Workinesh says on the issue:

School leaders are appointed to serve both the pre-primary and the primary schools. I think the government has paid attention to the preschool program and the preschool leaders are assigned in that regard. Nevertheless, when I observe what they are doing I do not think these people (the school principals) have passed through genuine selection criteria as can be observed in the policy documents. Instead, I tend to agree with what people call the 'unwritten rules' of leadership appointment. Truly speaking, many times when we (teachers) discuss school principals' assignments, often we pick political affiliation, network, and nepotism or the 'unwritten rules' as a key criterion. To be very specific, after the 'pseudo competition' process is carried out the final rubber stamp is done by the woreda ruling political party officer. Many of us do not agree with the merit of the assigned principals simply because of the pseudo competition process. In fact, in many cases, the manifestation of their derailed leadership skills also witnesses the fraud.

As can be understood from the discussion made earlier, the position of school principalship is owned beyond the wall. In most cases, no honest competition is made to assign school principals. The participants of the study were skeptical about the successful application of the selection criteria. In a nutshell, the participants pointed the blame finger at the education structure. From the

reflections of the two participants, one can conclude that the assignment of ECCE leadership is not free from malpractices of the education system; the problem seems structural.

**4.1.4.2 Appointment in Private Preschools: Owners' Goodwill and Competition.** A close examination of the data from participants of the interview reveals that in the private preschool, most leadership positions are possessed by appointment. The nomination was undertaken on the basis of two important approaches of leadership assignment: one is owners' goodwill or subjective judgment (see Yeshiharege's quote below) and the second is a competition to some extent. Yeshiharege's, who is a private preschool principal at Hunde, frank description shows the notion of the subjective assignment. Yeshiharege's assignment was accidental while Tilahun's was quite competitive and by the book. The assignments of the two persons are quite different. The subsequent quote from Yeshihareg illustrates the same:

I was a little surprised when I got this position some six years ago. I remember I had a very good relationship with the preschool owners. Actually, there were teachers who had a long teaching experience than me. When the former principal left the position, I was given the opportunity to lead the preschool without my expectation; it was accidental. At that time, I thought there were many competent teachers with whom I have been working, who deserved the position.

In comparison, Tilahun's assignment was less accidental. He described the practice as follows:

Five years back, I assumed this position based on competition. I was not a staff member of this preschool. The vacant position was advertised publicly. It was an open notice. I applied for the position advertised on the basis of the selection criteria. The selection criteria included exams and interviews. Relevant qualifications (especially in ECCE was beneficial) and

teaching experience were given high points. Eventually, I was selected from the shortlisted and interviewed candidates and assumed this position. I felt that my experience and qualifications enabled me to secure the post.

Besides, many participants agreed that the provision and promises made by the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of 1994, which underscores the need to have professional education managers at all levels of education, did not set a defined standard for ECCE principalship position (Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1994). In addition, there is no qualified ECCE principal; actually, there is no ECCE principals training scheme in place, to date. Instead, the principals, not specifically prepared for the job to run the sub-sector. As a result, individuals who lack competency, knowledge, and skills of ECCE leadership overwhelm the ECCE principal's assignment. It can be said that it is the ECCE teachers and primary school teachers who serve as the pool of ECCE principal-ship from which ECCE principals are recruited or assigned. With respect to this, participants agreed that the private preschool principals are either recruited in an open competition from the market or assigned from the school teachers based on competition (most commonly on the basis of teaching experience and qualification). Alternately, the preschool owners directly appoint them. There are also times when the owner would manage by himself or herself.

**4.1.4.3 Females as the Preferred ECCE Leaders.** After I realized that the ECCE leaders in the schools I studied were dominantly females, I raised the following questions to participants: Who do you think is a better ECCE leader? Male or female? Nearly all female participants uniformly replied that female teachers are better than their male counterparts to assume the leadership position of the ECCE center. The practice seems to be guided by the “feminine” traits which are prescribed as care, passion, compassion, and a healthy dose of optimism (Seong Ng, Nguyen, Wong & Choy, 2013). The opinion of four participants such as Tiyu, Liya, Sara, and Workinesh's, is indicative of this trend. Here below is their opinion:

**Tiyu:** I chose female leaders over the male ones for preschools. *Why?* We females are like their mothers. Kids are like a blank slate or a white paper. They are lovely. Mother means love. Even there is a difference between those who have a child and have no child. Women (principals) and particularly those who are mothers are better.

When I challenged her notion saying, males are also fathers. She laughed sarcastically and maintained her disagreement:

Oh, it is not the same. You guys have no patience,” she continued, “We females have patience and we take care of children with love and affection. Nevertheless, these days you (males) are also fine but still preschools opt for females.

Liya holds a similar position; she states that females are more competent compared to their male counterparts. She asserted:

In my opinion, ECCE leaders should be females. Females are good enough in child management. This is because of their natural characteristics. They can easily understand the emotions and feelings of children. They are softhearted, benevolent and they look for the pleasant things in the life of a child. They are also determined to scarify their time, knowledge, expertise, and some other resources for the betterment of children. Due to these attributes, one cannot find any slack in jobs related to childcare and education. From the females themselves, the married ones and women who gave birth to a child seem more relevant to the job. I am not belittling males but actually, females are mothers and they have a special attachment with children. These experiences give them an upper hand to be preferred over males in childcare and relevant professions.

Sara, one of the teacher participants also talks in a very similar terms about the leadership skills of the female principal. She said:

My principal came to power by improving her education. Before she assumed this position, she was a staff member. She has a special affection for children. I think, at this level, the very important criterion to be a leader should be the love of children. In my opinion, that makes her competent. Her rapport with her staff, the teachers is also great.

Workinesh is also of the same opinion describing the crucial roles that were played by her former female principal, compared to the current (male) principal.

The previous principal (female principal) was very much committed to the ECCE program. She offered a good deal of support to strengthen a child's education. For example, she has established a good playground for children. However, after her departure her successor, (a male principal) has done nothing. To your surprise, as you might observe the previously established outdoor materials are outdated due to lack of maintenance.

From my personal observation, I was also able to witness those female principals demonstrate good communication skills and respect compared to their male counterparts. Unlike their male counterparts, I was, for example, able to see the female principals were very polite, communicative, and easily accessible either in person or on phone. In a word, I have found them to be less bureaucratic. In contrast, the male principals were less polite and rigid. In other words, my female principal respondents appear to qualify what Ozga and Walker (1995) noted, "Women ... run more closely knit schools than men, and communicate better with teachers. They use different, less dominating body language. They seem to be more flexible (than males) and sensitive" (p. 37).

#### ***4.1.5 The Leadership Behavior of ECCE Leaders***

As indicated in the literature review, studying ECCE from the point of leadership requires understanding the existing leadership behaviors. That is because individual leaders tend to emphasize one of the styles more than the other. The present section is grounded on situational leadership theory or the life cycle theory of leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969, 1982). The situational leadership model lays emphasis on the interaction of a leader's task behavior, relationship behavior, and followers' maturity levels in determining the leadership behavior of a given leader.

Therefore, with this understanding, to run or ruin the ECCE center's battalion, characteristics of the ECCE leader, teacher's maturity, and context of the preschool environment has a direct bearing on the manifested behavior of an ECCE leader. For instance, teachers 'maturity level' or teachers' competency to do a given job or the extent to which teachers are able and willing to discharge their roles dictates the leadership behavior of the ECCE leader. To put it differently, the amount of education and/or experience that the individual has acquired serves as the barometer to gauge the level of his/her maturity level so that influences the leadership behavior of a given leader. This in turn is attributed to the success of the ECCE leader. In connection with this, participants of the present study noted that the most commonly exhibited leadership behavior is contingent upon the leader, teachers' maturity or readiness level, and context-specific. Mostly, the details are discussed in the next section.

**4.1.5.1 Telling (Directing).** As can be realized from discussions made with government ECCE center participants including Sara, Kedija, and Tiyu, their leaders display a directing leadership behavior. Participants were of the same opinion in describing at least three key points such as the presence of close supervision, the visible heavy hands of the leader, and the passive

roles played by teachers in the process of decision-making activity. Examining the explanations made by Sara, Kedija, and Tiyu gives a better understanding of the leadership behaviors principals' exhibit. For Sara,

Principals come in person and tell you what should be done. Usually, they call meetings to keep us alert and to get ready and organize ourselves when they get information about an official supervisory visit from the higher-ups. They do this to help us not to be judged poorly by the evaluators. Otherwise, most often they are accustomed to do things by themselves. They do not engage teachers. I do not think they have confidence in what we have been doing. If our principal had confidence in us, she would not tell us how to do a series of tasks and when to do them.

Sara agrees. She says that the school leader often controls teachers too much observing their teaching methods; how they handle the kids; and whether they keep the cleanliness of children's toilets and the compound. However, unlike Tiyu, she is appreciative of some follow-up.

Similarly, Kedija, the teacher participant, is unhappy about the ECCE center principal. She indicated the presence of irresponsible school leaders and the manifestation of poor leadership skills. Her next longer remark also substantiated what she told me in a sentence. She uncovered:

They come here in person and give us orders. They check our plans. They control us; most of the time we also come on time. Both of us (my colleague and I) respect the time and discharge our responsibilities. What matters is your willingness to do a given job; otherwise, people cannot make you work. Your commitment pushed you to get involved. We engage ourselves like our private business all day long (from the flag ceremony to the last minute of the day, until parents receive their children). Unfortunately, if we come late

the school leader (especially the vice leader) warns us not to repeat some other day. In a word, there is close supervision.

Likewise, when Kedija was asked to have further clarification, she conveyed:

When we get committed and request them (leaders) about things to be improved or fulfilled in the ECCE they discourage us. Referring to our contractual employment status, they told us we have no right to present questions for the center. They also humiliate us as it is none of our business. *'Bofa mataa hoo dhahan achumatti hafa mitii, nuti bofa mataa dhahan taane'* (if you hit a snake it remains there, now we are like the smashed snake). Both of us (teachers) were graduates of 10th grade and we began teaching without ECCE training. If the leadership is accountable for the quality of a child's learning, they should have given us training and or a further education opportunity in the fields of ECCE.

As to, communication Tiyu's opinion reveals the presence of one-way communication. She pointed it out as:

Most of the time decisions are not shared. The management has been doing everything within closed doors. We are presented with the decisions already made. This is what has been practiced most of the time since I joined this profession. For example, sometimes the director brought issues to the table particularly in a meeting or in person. However, the worst thing is she tells you what she wants to tell you. Surprisingly, after a while, she begins elaborating her opinion by providing more evidence using much time herself. Finally, even if she gave you few chances of participation particularly in a meeting, she didn't accept whatever comes from participants. If you dare to oppose her views, she gets embarrassed. In contrast, if you support her opinions, she calls you now and then and finally concludes her thoughts.

**4.1.5.2 Selling (Coaching).** Participants of this study reported as coaching was a leadership behavior that was commonly practiced among leaders. They described that their leaders exhibited a sort of participatory leadership style but they accustomed to retreat to their initial behaviors. Liya and Tilahun's observation describes the attempts made to regard teachers' ideas and to realize the two-way communication. In this regard, Liya's and Tilahun's views can be cited as evidence of this. Liya explained:

We receive orders through a different mechanism: written and in person. For example, if the intention is to communicate a short message, the leader often gives us a short briefing during the morning, lunch, or at the time of departure using 5-10 minutes. If the issue requires more discussion and a common decision, we usually hold a formal meeting on Fridays (in the afternoon).

In the same way, Tilahun shares a similar opinion, conveying that:

The problem is, there is a knowledge gap among and between teachers themselves. I have been suffering a lot in putting them on the same page. Most of the time, I have been telling them what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. To be honest, I am bored of giving them orders, to the extent that it makes my life what we call hectic. Even though there are some experienced teachers, they are not doing things by themselves. I do not know why always they are looking for orders. Most commonly, they fear of doing mistakes and they are badly looking for my approval. Nevertheless, I have a very good relationship with all staff members.

However, in my observation, the relationship that he had with the teacher under his supervision was not smooth unlike he said in the interview. From my observation, the principal arranged an appointment with the children's parents for a simple issue, which implied the bureaucratic behavior of the leader.

**4.1.5.3 Participating.** Considering the nature of participants' discussion and the focuses of their conversation, it can be said that both teachers and the leader were on equal footings on every piece of the decision-making process. Interviewees noted as participatory leadership was commonplace for private preschools. With regards to this, Liya and Sara's views are illustrative. Liya indicated, "... we have a good relationship with the school leader. We have been doing our job with love and common understanding...When a problem arises we often conduct a series of meetings and resolve it on time...."

She added:

In my previous school, the school leader used to give all responsibilities to teachers.

Personally, I am against the idea of leaving teachers free of management control. It is not good; it should not be. It is not feasible...." She further elaborated, "I have learned a number of things from the leader. She (the school leader) tried to make us work in love and cooperation. She also consulted us where necessary.

Likewise, Sara explained,

The school administration holds meetings about three times a week. When some vital issues arise, usually she (the director) calls us for a meeting for the deliberation over the issue.

This tends to imply that participatory leadership was in place in the centers.

In sum, these quotations suggest that participatory leadership has been commonly observed in private owned preschools.

**4.1.5.4 Delegating (Empowering).** The free reign leadership behavior has garnered the larger voices of “O”-class participants of the present study. Hands-off leadership has emerged as a key component of the section from the empirical material (see diagram below). Concerning this, interviewees were asked about the leadership style exhibited in the center in which they were working and had their reflection on it. For example, one of them, Hana, indicated as the leadership style tended to be *laissez-faire*.

She added:

The school leader’s focus is not towards us (the preschool); it is towards the primary school. We are doing almost everything on the basis of our interest by ourselves.

Sometimes, we have been requesting them (the principals) what they should support. With the exception of some material supports, they could not give us orders and guidelines.

When she was asked about what the incumbent school leader had been doing, she explicated:

It is negligible unless we have asked them for some material support they remain passive. It is we (the preschool teachers) who instigates them. From the school leaders, nobody has been tracking the progress of the preschool or no one is monitoring the status of the subsector. To be honest, we (the preschool teachers) are fully engaged in the process of the job requirement per se. As I told you earlier, it is we who initiates the demand of the preschool and requests them to find resources. Amazingly, unless we visit them to find some resources or guidelines they wouldn’t come to us and check our difficulties.

The other respondent, Sara, explained the presence of teachers autonomy and the existence of the hands-off leadership style. She uttered it as:

If we encounter a problem and cut classes without the knowledge of the school leader, they said nothing as long as we (teachers) cover for one another. The school has also no

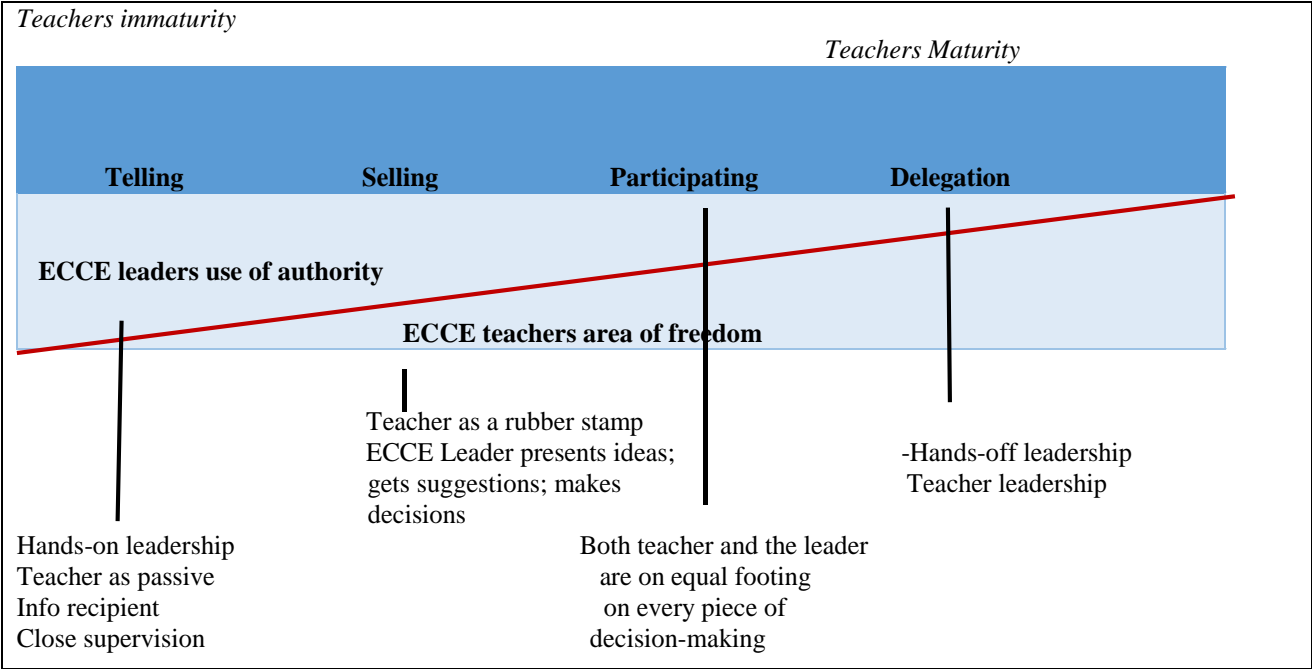
guidelines pertaining to the preschool. I think we are using a rule of the thumb approach which comes from the private schools. We don't have the KG standard set by the government, no one is worried to access and implement the policy but we (teachers) know it by heart.

Similar observations were made by Workinesh. She indicated the laissez-faire nature of the administration by the newly appointed principal in her school. She articulated it as:

The previous female principal's leadership style was participatory. ECCE was her center of attention....This year she left the school. Now we have another principal (male principal) and the ECCE program is found in a desperate situation. I am still thinking that the variation stemmed from lack of attention.

Based on the idea of Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1982,1988), the following Figure 3 and Table 7, which is drawn from the responses of the participants' likely elucidate the range and the fluidity of the leadership behaviors of the ECCE center. Besides, I believe that the continuum ostensibly depicted the summary of the earlier discussions made in simple terms. It could also paint a clear picture of what it means, and the interdependence and the flow of the leadership styles based on the leaders' use of power as well as teachers' maturity level.

**Figure 3: ECCE Leaders Situational Leadership Behavior Continuum**



The ECCE leader’s leadership style is also determined by counting the number of respondent choices reflecting each of the four situational leadership behaviors. These include (1) Telling, (2) Selling, (3) Participating, and (4) Delegating. In doing so, I believe that the next Table 7 contributes to a clear and precise understanding of the revealed leadership behavior at ECCE centers.

**Table 7: Frequencies of Responses Related to Leadership Behavior (Coding and classification of responses from summarized interview data)**

ECCE Center	Number of Participants	ECCE leader's demonstrated leadership behavior				Combined behaviors
		a) Telling - Directing - Heavy-hand - Close supervision - Specific instruction Unable /unwilling Or insecure	b) Selling -Coaching -Explain decisions and provide an opportunity for clarification Unable /willing Or confident	c) Participating -Supporting -share ideas and facilitate in decision making - Democratic - Supporting Able /unwilling Or insecure	d) Delegating -Empowering - Permissive - Hands-off - Laissez-fair Able /willing Or confident	
<b>Selam</b> (Private)	3	1	2	3	1	b & c
<b>Enat</b> (Gov't)	3	2	1	1	3	a & d
<b>Fikir</b> (Gov't)	3	1	2	1	3	b & d
<b>Tesfa</b> (Private)	3	3	2	1	1	a, & b
<b>Abdi</b> (Gov't)	3	1	-	2	3	c & d
<b>Hunde</b> (Private)	3	3	2	2	1	a, b, & c
<b>Experts</b>	3	1	3	3	1	b & c
<b>Sub total</b>	21	12	12	13	13	-
<b>Gov't (total)</b>	11	4	3	4	9	1a, 3d
<b>Private (total)</b>	10	7*	6	6	3	2a, 3b, 2c, d
<b>Grand total</b>	21	11	9	10	12	3a, 4b, 3c, 4d
<b>Rank</b>		2	4	3	1	6a,7b,5c,8d

The frequency of words/phrases by participants revealed key factors which are categorized under the four major situational leadership behaviors: (a) Telling, (b) Selling, (c) Participating, and (d) Delegating. Of these leadership behaviors, the recurring behavior is assumed to be the dominant leadership behavior of each ECCE center (see Table7 above). For instance, given the increased occurrence rate of the behavior, if we compare the leadership behavior in private and government

ECCE centers, as can be seen in Table 4 above, delegating was the dominant leadership behavior manifested by the government ECCE centers whereas telling was the commonly employed leadership behavior of the private ECCE centers. When we come to the overall rankings of the behaviors, delegating, telling, participating, and selling leadership styles stood 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> respectively.

Hence, delegating was the leadership behavior most observed in the ECCE centers followed by telling, which is found in the other extreme of the continuum. The modestly observed leadership behavior became the participatory leadership style. Finally, selling appeared to be seriously underrepresented.

**4.1.5.5 Caring Leadership.** Caring leadership is the sub-theme that has emerged from the empirical material. Though not as exactly as reported in Louis et al. (2016), a considerable number of participants shared the view. Interestingly, one of the school leader participants, articulated as “My job is one thing; it is caring for the child.” To put it differently, he had the feeling that participants would unanimously agree to the idea that in preschools caring and leadership are like two sides of the same coin.

As can be recalled from discussions made earlier in relation to who should be a preschool leader, some participants’ intention, as quoted above (e.g., Tiyu, Liya, Sara, and Workinesh), in choosing females for the principalship position seemed to make the early childhood environment child-friendly. For example, Liya argued as ECCE leaders to be females for they are good enough in child management. In her own words, “They can easily understand the emotions and feelings of children. They are soft-hearted, kind, look for a conducive child care environment.” She added, “I’m not belittling males but females are mothers and they have a special attachment with children, the experience gave them an upper hand to be preferred over males in child care and relevant professions.”

In the same way, Tiyu argued as females more appropriate than males to be ECCE leaders. She argued, “I chose female leaders over the male ones for preschools. *Why?* We females are like our mothers....You guys (males) have no patience. We females have patience and we care for them with love and affection....”

Likewise, Workinesh was in favor of female leaders to ECCE. She said, “During the time of the previous female principal, the leadership style was participatory. ECCE was her center of attention. She believed that all children are born with equal intelligence; the difference lies in how we treat them.”

As shown in the various sections presented earlier, empirical materials gathered from teachers, principals, parents, and experts did not likely entail the absence of a caring leadership style. More precisely, they have been revolved around the theme of caring leadership in different ways. Respondents’ views are reflective of this. For example, Hana reflected her view as:

A female teacher resembles a child’s mother. Sometimes children defecate, vomit, urinate, and or get sick. This situation calls for a caring and kind attitude and practice. With regard to this from the point of social roles, I think female teachers adopted more of this behavior.

Another respondent, Liya, was in favor of females to be ECCE leaders from the perspective of care. She said, “We reached school every morning at 1:40 local time and receive children with affection (by hugging, kissing, and patting their heads) from the gate. All of us (teachers and the leader) have been doing the same.” As she indicated in her response, they developed this from the program that they had attended. In her own words:

In the training, we have learned that to give a child a bright day and create a friendly learning environment, sharing a great sense of humor and love is an important piece of care. Instead of waiting for children in the classroom, collecting them from the gate with love

and care builds their self-confidence and sense of belongingness. This in turn simplifies our job, for their appetite would likely be opened wide to education.

When she was asked about the benefits of relationships, she went on to elaborate:

It has a couple of advantages to develop a child's behavior. For example, many students were sleeping in the morning school hours due to watching too much TV every night. Some children also tend to manifest some misbehaviors to their peers, which they have learned from some irrelevant TV programs (e.g., tragedies, fights, and or '*kana film*', a film translated from one of the Indian films). Some come to school without combing their hair because of the morning hour rashness or carelessness of their parents, and other children have a lack of appetite (maybe due to poor sanitary conditions of their utensils). Therefore, among other things, sharing information with parents and developing a common understanding about the child's situation, and looking for a joint decision creates a sound child care spirit and environment.

In the same manner, Genet indicated the role that caring has for children in the school context. She explained, "By their very nature, children loose attention at ease. Given the environment, to get rid of boredom, it is our responsibility to offset the problem by creating a varied and joyful learning environment." The other respondent, Kedija, tended to stress the need for the government to give attention to the ECCE. She elaborated it as:

I think the government has to give due attention to resolve this problem. In constructing a house, if the basement of the house is not well founded, the would-be house could not be long-lasting or rock-solid. Thus, a child should be properly cared for and educated until six or eight. Otherwise, nothing would come in his/her future practices of schooling. I am happy to see you researching this area because this could be part of the solution. I am optimistic that the government would address this challenge. In Ethiopia, we should invest in

these foundational stages of human development; if not, what do we expect from the coming generation?

Another principal, Tirunesh, emphasized the role of caring leadership for children in their development in a kind of analogy to the development of a seedling. She explicated:

Do you know a tree, when a tree is not well planted from the very beginning once the tree is getting matured it is hardly possible to rework it. Thus, children are like seedlings when you take care of them they will grow up fully otherwise they will grow ill. No principal has been attending the ECCE management. Teachers do not know how to teach preschool children. They have been teaching like primary school. If I had power, I would give them sufficient space, fulfill materials, and employ professional teachers.

From the discussions above, it is possible to deduce that caring leadership is a widely undertaken approach in the ECCE centers in Ethiopia, as a leadership behavior. I also believe that caring leadership might add value to pay considerable attention to the leadership process of the ECCE sector, as a key contributing component of the system, thereby enlarge once understanding in ECCE settings. This is because caring leadership is empirically confirmed in the health sector, leaving the voices of education scholars in this respect unheard.

#### ***4.1.6 Organizational Citizenship Behavior in ECCE Leadership***

**4.1.6.1 ECCE teachers OCB.** In relation to this, almost all participants unanimously reported that female ECCE teachers had been voluntarily engaged in the practices of ECCE above and beyond the call of duty. For example, one of the respondents, Kedija explained the presence of three dimensions of OCB: altruism, civic virtue, and conscientiousness in somewhat detailed form as:

I have been extending a very generous contribution to the generation. I have been paid a small amount of salary (1370 ETB). Nowadays, it is almost impossible to make a living

from such a very small amount of money here in Ethiopia. I would not deserve this much salary with nine years of teaching experience. I am quite sure I can make more money if I switch my means of livelihood, but the situation of these children is heartbreaking. Their living condition urged me to give them what I have at least professionally. It is not either for the school leader's satisfaction or for the amount of salary that is paid to me but for (parents) send their children without food. Their (parents) hand to mouth life cannot allow them to afford their (children) food and fulfill other basic needs including educational materials.

In the same way, Sara elaborated on the extent to which she has been devoted to the coming generation. She conveys a clear message about the popularity of OCB among female ECCE teachers. Her observation is more telling:

Every year I am teaching 60-70 children, but look, my salary is only 1400 ETB. What shall I do with this small amount of money? In fact, during my employment I promised not to look for money but children (the coming generation). Now, am unhappy with the the generation. Most of my children are from the poorest community. Even some of them amount of salary. The only thing that makes me stay in this profession is not the brilliant salary but the love of children. I suggest that the government should pay a fair amount of salary for preschool teachers including the community employees.

Another respondent, Genet, also had a similar view about how teachers exhibited organizational citizenship behavior irrespective of some factors like low salary. She stated the situation, "We are not here for money but the generation. Leaders of this school encountered a shortage of an operational budget. For instance, some of my staff members receive a small amount of salary (1370 ETB)."

As alluded to earlier, the snippets above illustrate that regardless of some hiccups like the small amount of salary, ECCE teachers displayed behavior that surpassed the formal job requirements. Specifically, they (teachers) seemed to hold a positive attitude towards the wellbeing of the coming generation instead of complaining about their interests. Such genuine concern, intention, and goodwill can still further be evidenced by the view from respondents of the study as in the following plain report from their interviews. For example, Sara explained:

I am so much pleased when I see the academic competency of my previous children. It is inspiring to find the positive developments of my former children. This is what I have been living for. Even if I die I do not mind; nothing is more than looking at their success (she became emotional). For me their achievement is priceless. So far, I have produced a good number of professionals (doctors, engineers, and so forth). I strongly believe that my job is to build the biggest generation. Therefore, at this level, if they are well-founded they would flourish big.

She added:

To share with you one of my encounters, three years ago, I have got a transfer to another organization; but I refused the proposal which came from my employer. This happens due to the love of the profession and my children (the preschool children assigned to her). Here, even though I am not benefited I believe that children are much benefited and parents are also glad to be with me. Hence, the relationship and love that I have developed with all these people make me reject the proposed transfer.

Consistent with Sara's view, another female teacher participant, Hana, revealed her anecdotal evidence implying her commitment when she was under an adverse situation when she gets fired from her teaching job. She stated the situation as:

Previously, I was an employee of the RPC but amidst the year without my knowledge, I was fired from the job. Yet, at that time, I have decided not to leave my children (the preschool children assigned to her) and pursued the job at least until another teacher takes me over. Fairly enough, the then school leader transferred my employment from the NGO to the community. Since then I have been working as a community employed preschool teacher. By doing so, the school leader allowed me not to be dismissed from my job and to stay with the children.

Still, the quotes below, from Kedija's and Tiyu's interviews, bolster this trend and indicated the extent to which female teachers are loyal to the ECCE profession. The fact that volunteering for unpaid tasks and working overtime are corroborative of working above the norm or what Organ (1988) called conscientiousness - an expression of commitment. Kedija presented the situation as:

If you ask me, I am doing it for the fear of God and to my conscience; in fact, both of us (including my professional colleague, teacher Ayantu). The primary school leaders are not leading us with a similar and constant temperature. They are conditional. Sometimes they (the school leaders) tend to control us, and surprisingly the school leaders forget the center. They are good enough to tackle the worries of primary school but the case of the ECCE took the second position (if any).

In the same way, Tiyu described:

We are doing an extra job in our break hours to the extent that we took some tasks to our homes. A preschool teacher spent much of her time preparing for lessons (e.g., producing teaching aids, correcting home take assignments, and so on). Besides, we do have a great understanding among and between teachers, we assist each other. Even though we don't have committed leadership, the staff is likely in place to support each other both professionally and socially.

From all these respondents' views, it can be said that female teachers were found to have good organizational citizenship behavior *in ECCE*.

**4.1.6.2 ECCE Leaders OCB.** Though not in great detail and consensually, the following Genet's self-contradictory opinion implies ECCE leaders' roles in creating fertile ground for OCB to happen. When she was asked about whether or not *the* staff was working up to their capacity, she explained:

I am not sure enough about others but am doing up to my capacity. In fact, a human being is not perfect. I am doing my best, you know why; the love that you fetched from the administration encourages you to do so. The preschool environment particularly the situation of the school management is quite encouraging to do your job happily. I should say every member of this organization is pleased with the positive treatment of the school leadership. As a result, we have nothing to put aside or reserve, we likely deliver what we can and expected of us as a teacher.

To one of my follow up probes presented to Kedija and Hana about leaders' OCB in ECCE centers, Kedija elaborated:

Regardless of the problem, I do not think leaders have sufficient job determination by themselves. For instance, the preschool children have no play materials, they have also been played over the stony ground. If a child failed and wounded during playtime we do not have alcohol at least for minor injuries from the school. Practically, when it happens and I look for a leader's reactions towards the incident they demonstrate reluctance. On the other hand, as I told you we are low-paid workers, when we ask them for a salary increment their response is quite embarrassing. The school leader and the woreda education officials are not worried about the performance of the center. They would visit us to collect data (mainly children's statistics). If we bring an issue to the school leader or to the woreda education

officials, you do not find an honest response. These days' people are running after money; I do not think they have been living up to their profession. Some educational officials would not have a genuine professional position to deliver what is expected of them rather soft-soaping. As a result, I do not trust them (leaders), I lost hope due to their fake treatment. However, to move the system (the ECCE center) forward we have been played multiple roles including teacher, assistant teacher, janitor, guard, and so on. In brief, to the best of my knowledge, the leadership is not concerned about ECCE. They do not care about what is happening in the ECCE.

The above-mentioned Kedija's view was supported by Hana's observation, she articulated: We get tired of asking several questions related to our daily routines. If you ask some questions about the demand for the job and often end up in a negative response, you get bored to ask another one. Instead, you may go to look for alternative ways and do the job by yourself.

Workinesh's, a school teacher herself and member of the PTSA, opinion was further evidence that female principals were likely better-demonstrated OCB in ECCE centers. However, her opinion was not unanimously supported by other participants' views. She indicated, "The previous principal (female principal) was very much committed to the ECCE program. She offered a good deal of support to strengthen a child's education. That is, she has established a good playground for children." Besides, the following account of Workinesh indicates the extent to which ECCE leaders had practiced OCB. She revealed:

I think they can report the shortage of preschool teachers to the woreda education office and obtain more staff members; but, they didn't. In deed, I have been teaching 65 children without an assistant teacher. In other private preschools, they all have assistant teachers but in this school, none of us has an assistant teacher. Managing all these children with a single

teacher is impossible. I am spending a tough time. Nowadays I am suffering from a kidney due to a burdensome task.

#### ***4.1.7 The Employment of Pedagogical Leadership in ECCE Centers***

The result of this section is presented from the domain of pedagogical leadership in ECCE centers. In connection with this, the 1994 Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia and the 2010 ECCE policy document strongly urges a fundamental change to be made from the traditional teaching approach to the active learning model. Given this idea in mind participants of the present study reports the results of the current situation of ECCE centers.

The succeeding quotes from participants' remarks on what they observe as the key factors determining the current situation of pedagogical leadership in ECCE centers are illustrative of their voices on the theme. These quotes demonstrate a variety of opinions on the matter, as well as the strength of these participants' convictions about the implementation of pedagogical leadership. Four major categories or themes such as the active learning pedagogy, playfulness of the learning environment, ECCE staff professionalization, and merger of "O"-class children of different ages are discussed successively.

**4.1.7.1. Professionalism of the ECCE Leadership.** One of the subthemes that emerged from discussions held with participants was professionalism. As it stands here, in the context of ECCE, it was found to be an intriguing point of discussion. Almost all participants revealed that staff professionalization in ECCE centers appeared to be the sine qua non of the sound leadership, education, and care system. In the same vein, they indicated as the ECCE program was overwhelmed by para-professionals, unprofessional, and/or inexperienced ECCE practitioners and predominantly, this was true for rural-based O-class centers. In short, nearly all participants expressed that ECCE practitioners lacked professionalism.

Given these points, teachers' and principals' competency, training offered, and issues pertaining to experience sharing programs were discussed with participants as hereinafter. To illustrate, Workinesh, one of the PTA members and an English teacher working at one of the rural sites, elaborated about the issues in depth as:

I do not have ECCE training but I have been made to serve the ECCE program. I have graduated in English from Dilla University. My assignment to the ECCE program intends to teach alphabets and to create opportunities for children to stay at school with their peer groups. With regards to the teacher's assignment, a teacher who is assigned for the preschool program should be competent in child care and management and at least should be equipped with some basic training to bring up to the job. I think what has been done by the government pertaining to preschool teachers' assignment is a paradox when it comes to the ECCE policy of the nation. The so-called 'facilitators', who failed to pass grade 10 are made to directly join the profession probably due to lack of ECCE trained teachers or some other reasons. The worst thing is that the employees disparage the status of the job by themselves (they do not have willingness). Moreover, no training has been given (about whom to teach, what to teach, and how to teach); they have been doing what they feel is right instead of the demand of the profession. Most commonly, what they (the unprofessional and the inexperienced O-class teachers) have been doing is writing alphabets or a list of numbers on the blackboard and followed by a series of drills all daylong often holding sticks.

Yeshihareg, the veteran urban-based preschool principal, sharing Workinesh's view, noted as the current ECCE graduate teachers lacked professional competence. She explained:

Compared to the previous ECCE graduate teachers of Menen or Yekatit 12 schools, for instance, the current ECCE graduates' professional competency is not good enough. I feel

that and people talk about the professional incompetency of these days ECCE graduates. These graduates (the current graduates) hardly care and educate children below eight. I think they could not educate themselves and develop at least the key knowledge areas, skills, and competencies to be possessed by an ECCE educator. I can witness that they cannot properly handle children and I could see some of them even failed to properly spell words or prepare child-friendly teaching aids.

As mentioned, concerning the quality of ECCE teachers' training institutions, there appeared to be a consensus among participants of the present study as they had been operating below the standard. Emphatically, participants underscored that the current ECCE teachers training institutions (mainly the urban-based private ones) were working in an environment where no competition and pseudo quality assurance and monitoring mechanism was in place. This situation is evident in the following quotes taken from Genet's interview.

As I told you, there is a serious problem with respect to teachers' professional competency. A teacher should be capable and skillful to teach preschool students. If a given teacher is not competent, s/he is getting confused and confuses the children. At the end of the day, children may hate education or end up with poor personality. Hence, the worrisome situation of this sort should be improved.

She added:

With regard to teachers' training, there is a poor ECCE teacher training system. I think the government has to devise an easy and sufficient platform to build ECCE teachers' competency. For example, what if the government has opened the preschool teachers training institute. As you could see these days, incompetent private institutions overwhelm the preschool teachers' training program. The majority of us are the output of these training institutions. The rate of tuition fees is higher compared to our income. In addition, the

tuition fee is costly. We cannot afford it. It could have been fine if the government intervenes it and provides free of charge training for preschool teachers. Especially am looking for this sort of intervention because many preschool teachers wish to have professional training.

A close examination of the empirical material related to the staff professionalization of the available ECCE workers revealed that the very young children (below eight), who should have deserved developmentally appropriate care and education, were found at the mercy of para-professionals or nonprofessionals. Equally, the data from my school observation uncovered the prevalence of “deprofessionalization” in the ECCE sector (Tekleselassie, 2002, p.57). The tradition of assigning any graduate to the education sector without specialization is becoming a norm. This was what was most commonly observed in the private sector. To exemplify, in some of the observed preschools, non-ECCE professionals such as engineers, accountants, information technologists (IT) graduates, human resources managers, and so on were found rendering services in the positions of leadership and teaching.

Regardless of some sporadic attempts, no training opportunities were in place for the incumbent ECCE principals and teachers either by the government or by the private sector.

Regarding this, Tilahun, a school principal has the following to say:

In this school, I do have experience of eight years in the position of preschool principal.

However, given the nowadays government attention offered to the ECCE program, I didn't receive any sort of formal leadership training on ECCE either from the government side or from my employer. Actually, I obtained a diploma in ECCE from Wisdom College at Hawassa. Apart from that, I do not have any formal training (in-serve or off service) on ECCE over the last eight years.

In contrast, participants working for private preschools reported their participation in short-term training on childcare and management organized by the school administration. This was evident in their interview responses when they were asked whether they had received any training on ECCE. In this regard, Liya replied, “Yes, so far we have received training twice a year. The training was given by the school administrators and by guests (experts) from woreda education offices and elsewhere. The titles of the training were mainly on child care and how to interact with parents.” She further clarified:

In the training, we have learned that to give a child a bright day and create a friendly learning environment sharing a great sense of humor and love is an important piece of care. Instead of waiting for children in the classroom, collecting them from the gate with love and care builds their self-confidence and improves our attachment. This in turn simplifies our job, for their appetite would likely be opened wide to education.

In addition, Kedija and Tiyu articulated similar opinion with reference to the issue, as it is evident in the following quotes. Kedija expressed:

This year we participated in two pieces of training. The training topics were on childcare, teaching aid development, and teaching methodology. The training was good. We have learned quite a lot of things. We have also an experience-sharing program organized by the woreda education office. Using this program so far, we have participated in an experience-sharing program in three ECCE centers.

The following quote from Tiyu indicates this shared conception:

I have received training three to four times a year on childcare to improve preschool teaching methods for example. We have been spending the whole day teaching the same topic. Concerning teaching, I have offered different courses for my nursery students. The

course is Amharic, English, Science, Mathematics, Play, Music, and Sport as per the program. I have 35 students in my section at the nursery class.

Apart from training, another form of continuous professional development scheme was in place to improve the professional capability of the ECCE staff, in the form of experience sharing program among ECCE practitioners. On this, Kedija articulated:

This is true. We visited a school, once in two weeks, usually on Fridays. Even we do have tomorrow. So far, I think we have observed three or four schools. In the experience-sharing program, what we have learned is that the existing experiences such as how they have been interacting with children, what the school teachers have done, and so on. Typically, of all the things that I have learned from the visits is that a daily monitoring mechanism that is used to track the progress of every child appears very educative. To describe in some detail, a teacher prepares a folder for a child and write her/his name in alphabetical order for easy access. Then, you collect every piece of information (mainly handwritten) on a child's accomplishment on a daily basis. By doing so, a child's progress could be easily tracked. We found this as one of the important lessons drawn from the experience-sharing program. With respect to the body who had organized the experience-sharing program, she explained: The woreda education office and the school leader jointly coordinate the program. From the field visit, we have observed many things: the existing situation of the indoor and outdoor playgrounds, the classroom organization, the size of the compound, and the age appropriateness (suitability) of the toilet. The condition of the children's restroom and the preparation and utilization of teaching aids were part of the observation. In general, from the overall situation of the observed preschools, an important lesson was drawn.

A close observation of the interview data revealed that at the heart of ECCE centers operation, the availability of professional staff who could address at least the minimum demands of children could pave ways to build their future. However, in many cases (as can be understood from participants' quotes above), the marginalized profession, and the inadequately prepared ECCE teachers and principals could hardly produce competent citizens. Referring to the situation, Bassok et al., (2013) noted that throughout history, the ECCE workers have been characterized as a poorly qualified, under-paid, and unstable workforce. Parallel to this, Miller (2008) echoed that in England "the early years' employees are under-qualified, poorly paid and predominantly female" (p. 20).

**4.1.7.1.1 Active Learning Pedagogy.** The implementation of active learning pedagogy was tapped by questions such as: "How is pedagogical leadership employed in ECCE centers? How do you deliver lessons? Can you tell me your teaching methodology? Do you think that child-oriented pedagogy has been practiced in ECCE centers?" In this regard, in the course of responding to these questions, one of the participants, Tiyu, said, "Of all the school problems, the poorly executed child-friendly pedagogy is the worst."

When respondents were asked about the type of pedagogy in place, they had mixed feelings on the active learning approach. They had the same opinion in describing the de facto and their de jure understanding about the active learning approach. They also had the same view as the active learning approach seemed discounted. Instead, the teaching and learning process of the ECCE centers were overwhelmed with the chalk and talk, drills, and rote learning strategies. Respondents' views, as presented below in their actual words, are illustrative of the situation. First, Tiyu articulated:

The child-oriented pedagogy is not implemented. For instance, the training offered by an NGO called RPC (Reaching the Poorest Community) children should not be educated through a teacher-centered approach. They also advised us not to write too much on the

blackboard. As I said earlier, in our school the child-oriented approach is not yet implemented.

Alike Tiyu, Kedija also explained that due to parental influence the major indicators of teacher-centered approach such as the drill and chalk-and-talk approaches have been observed in the ECCE centers. With regard to this, Kedija disclosed:

The parents are looking for the drills. They are not happy to see their children learning through play method. Parents request us to give them (children) more homework and to do more writings. On our part we teach them sometimes via play but to be honest most of the time we do more writings on the blackboard and we implement the teacher-directed approach.

A more or less similar view is held by Hana, a teacher participant from the rural public ECCE center said to have a positive view towards the use of a child-oriented approach. In the words of her:

In fact, we have some teaching materials but to be frank, we don't have sufficient teaching materials as intended by professionals. I remember once upon a time the coordinator of the Cluster Resource Center (CRC) or the supervisor told me his dissatisfaction after observing my traditional teaching methods (when I am using the chalk and talk approach)<sup>1</sup>. Since then regardless of some hiccups, I've been attempting to make it child-oriented.

Likewise, the following quote from Sara, a female teacher participant, appears indicative of a good grasp of the active learning pedagogy. She says:

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<sup>1</sup> (In between our discussion Hana's class child came to us to look for some support we have allowed him to share his views she called him lovely, "*na abbaayyee min honeh new*" in Amharic and gave him some pat meaning, "**Come, dad, what is wrong with you?**" And addressed his problem with motherly due care and attention).

With regard to the teaching methodology of the child, I am very much pleased about one of my former principals. He advised us in person and training not to use a teacher-centered approach for preschool children. He warned me to strictly follow the play-oriented approach instead of running for the commonly practiced traditional method. He added that children do not deserve the chalk and talk approach because they are young enough to entertain it and if it occurs, it is a waste of time for both of you (teachers and the children).

On the contrary, the following two quotes from Liya and Genet somehow appears to disprove the total rejection of the teacher-centered approach. They point out to have a mix of the active learning and the teacher-centered approach. However, even though, they seem to have a mixed feeling about the use of the child-oriented approach, still, these participants witnessed its appropriateness. For instance, Liya explained:

Play-oriented and teacher-centered approach should take an equal status. I am in favor of the play method of teaching and at the same time, I do not agree with the total rejection of the teacher-centered approach. Children get bored if you put them oral every time you meet. When I teach using play-method, I found the school leaders were pleased about it. They did not complain about it rather they have assured its appropriateness. (Liya)

Still, when Genet was asked to have more clarification, she said:

Mainly I use the play method. For instance, we do not teach them every morning until 4:00 local time (LT). They have a TV program three times a week, which often addresses short stories by blending with other educative issues. I also used to tell short stories or ask riddles by myself or read from a text most often by connecting with the content of the daily lesson plan.

Briefly, participants of this study could not afford to ignore the poorly practiced active learning pedagogy in general terms. In addition, my personal ECCE center's observation corroborated the situation. The most compelling evidence of my classroom observations also identified as the mode of delivery was overwhelmed by the teacher's dominant model because children were made to sit quietly and pay attention to what they were told, implying the rule of the game. Children had limited opportunity to child-initiated education or an active learning kind of pedagogy in relation to the content of the subject matter. The drill was also one of the pedagogical elements most commonly used in ECCE centers I observed.

In sum, with the exception of insignificant attempts, at both urban and rural ECCE centers, I found similar instances in which the ECCE center teachers implemented the academic-oriented approach rather than play-based pedagogy. One could say the practice in all ECCE centers was contrary to Dewey's suggestion (cited in Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 2013) that education of the child becomes most effective when it considers the intellectual, the physical, social, and emotional needs of the child. The comment by Genet exemplifies practitioners' negative attitude towards the contribution of play. She said, "to make children successful I gave due attention to the academic issues rather than play. If you give more opportunities to play they forget education that is why I prefer to focus on academic matters than play." In a word, one can summarize that ECCE centers were converted from active learning programs to a structured primary school model.

**4.1.7.1.2 The Playfulness of the Learning Environment.** Before I turn to the examination of the playfulness of the learning environment and the position of the school community towards the playfulness of the ECCE centers, I contextualized the analysis with a description of the child-friendliness and the attitude towards play at the two school sites (the urban and the rural ECCE centers). Considering that Selam, Enat, and Tesfa were in urban settings, I expected that the playfulness of the school environment and the attitude towards play would provide a contrasting

view to Fikir, Abdi, and Hunde (in ECCE centers found in rural sites). However, it did not. Rather than differences between the two groups of ECCE centers, I found striking similarities along these dimensions. At both ECCE center sites (rural and urban), children were expected to spend much of their time sitting in the classrooms and attend formal course works rather than involving them in play-based activities. In other words, the scenario was contrary to Bartanen and Littlefield's (2015) contention that says, "playful activities offer a mix of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual rewards at all stages of life" (p. 160).

Regarding this, Tiyu, Liya, and Genet, the teacher participants, indicated the value of play but pinpointed some of the bottlenecks that hindered its feasibility, as in the following unabridged account from their interviews. Accordingly, Tiyu illuminated:

At the preschool level, play is of paramount importance. Every morning before classes at the flag ceremony all of us (the school leader, teachers, and children) have been singing, dancing, and jumping. In doing so, the school community creates a good rapport among us and inspired for the upcoming daily routines. Play contributes to their mental and socioemotional development. Again, during class hours if children are getting tired play ignites their emotions. At the preschool level, play is a means of educating children. Play enables us to educate the little kids, who are like a blank slate, without pressurizing them. Liya's agreement is more direct. She stated:

As per my profession, a preprimary school child has to spend seventy percent of his/her time playing. Nevertheless, what is going on here is the reverse. I think this is because the absence of play materials stemmed from the poor attitude towards a child's education.

Besides, while stating her beliefs about the current situation of play, Genet, another teacher participant reported:

Honestly speaking, play is not materialized in my school. As a preprimary school teacher, I have requested the school authorities to fulfill at least some of the basic play materials but they have ignored it. I do not think this is because of the absence of money alone; it seems the school leadership lack to understand the importance of play that it could accrue to the proper child development.

In relation to this, one of the PTA chairs (Admasu), whom I have interviewed, implicitly defined '*play as the act of disturbing*' and disclosed his attitude towards it. He stated his view, "Children are learning well, they are not disturbing or playing. When I visit the school I could see teachers are doing well even some of their students are keen on reading and writing. And I think we are on the right track."

As could be shared by many, the purpose of attending preprimary education seems to equip children with cognitive development. Besides, time spent playing is considered a wasted time. Also, this might be associated with a remedy to lift the academic deficiency, which may be observed in the successive levels of education. On the other hand, such kind of knowledge gap about the benefits of play could further impose a great deal of resistance to materialize a playful learning environment and the play-driven pedagogy.

The word for word interview with the veteran woreda education expert (Mohammed) might summarize the situation:

The ECCE centers have been conducted below the standard it deserves. The schools are not sufficiently equipped with necessary play materials. The school environment is not attractive and child-friendly. Children spent the majority of their school time in dusty classrooms....His pause was followed by my probing question, "How do you understand play in relation to the preprimary education or the ECCE centers of the woreda?" "Play is one of the crucial tools in the development of a child," He continued, "Yet, it is poorly

understood by many educators. I think children have to spend the majority of their time playing. This is not practical in our preschool classes I regret to say it is almost the other form of grade one because the teaching method and the subjects are almost the same.

Besides, pursuant to my document review, I also noted that five courses that were similar in their title with the first cycle primary school (1-4) were offered to students from nursery to upper KG children). These were Afan Oromo, Amharic, Mathematics, English, Environmental Science, and Esthetics. In all ECCE centers, children had to attend classes (every morning Monday to Friday from 8:00 AM to 3:30 PM). Six periods were allotted, every thirty minutes with a recess time of thirty minutes in between. This alludes the presence of developmentally age-inappropriate practices of learning and a hurried introduction of grade one. That is contrary to what Webb et al. (2013) tell us: children should not be introduced to specific subject matter until they are matured enough to master it. Webb et al. added that learning came through experience, not rote memorization.

Having this in mind, I was surprised about the poor attention offered to play materials installed at the playgrounds, specifically, the extent to which the schools were similar in ignoring the maintenance of play materials found in the school playgrounds. The implication is that the employment of play and the creation of a child-friendliness environment were impaired. To put it another way, in ECCE centers, the role of play was poorly perceived by the school community in general and the school leadership in particular in the process of child development. In addition, it seemed that children were implicitly prohibited from play, as they did not get adequate access to the outdoor play materials. Correspondingly, the learning environment was poorly equipped with outside play materials and thus children had no choice except to spend their playtime in demotivating compounds.

In interviews, principals (e.g., Bikila, Tirunesh, Olyad) who were working in public ECCE centers emphasized the challenges of running the poorly aided ECCE centers along with the other

relatively better budgeted higher classes (1-8). Bikila, the principal at Fikir, was concerned with the little attention given to the ECCE center children in general and play in particular. He elaborated the situation as:

The preprimary unit was established in the school nine years back in 2011 but a sufficient budget has not been allocated to run the program. The ECCE teachers are recruited by the school. It seems to me there is unfair distribution of resources as far as preprimary education is concerned. The block grant budget is not sufficient to run even the usual primary education subsector. This one is an attachment, these days it has been becoming beyond the capacity of the school. As you might observe the children have no adequate play materials. That is because of a lack of budget. The only thing we have from the government is the instruction to open the subsector and extend the service to the society but I do not think the how of the teaching and learning process has been taken into account.

As can be understood from Bikila's view budget shortfall seems to be reported as one of the administrative setbacks. The following quote from Kedija also bolstered the prevailing situation of Fikir's ECCE center. She explained:

As you might observe, the learning environment is not child-friendly this is because we don't have adequate play materials due to a lack of budget. We opened the program nine years ago, a negligible amount of budget is allocated to the program. Both the government block grant budget and the budget from the General Education Quality Improvement Project (GEQIP) called the school grant budget failed to sufficiently address the ECCE of ECCE center children. Nonetheless, we are told to run the program that is why we failed to serve children with the necessary play materials.

Above all, from my position as an observer, the poorly observed subsector was exposed to be treated unfairly by the school management due to budget issues. For example, the holes over the walls of the classrooms and the holes of the roof can illustrate the poor attention given to the ECCE center children in the process of creating a playful and conducive learning environment.

In theory, children are supposed to have well-equipped classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2010); however, the situation at Fikir was even quite discouraging. As indicated earlier, children of the ECCE classes were attending ‘the chalk-and-talk’ style of teaching in dusty and hollowed (from the roof and walls) classrooms. Amazingly, during the time of my classroom observations, I did not observe any play material. Both children and teachers did not seem comfortable about the reflection from the holes. Yet, the teacher, Kedija, was doing her drills in Afan Oromo class hour. Simultaneously, some of the kids were playing, talking to each other, moving from place to place, pushing one another to take seats, and so on but she was permissive. I thought that instinctively they were looking for an age-appropriate teaching method, the play-way and I had the feeling that the teacher was appreciative and permissive of that. Even, she looking confused and I felt that she was at the crossroads to make it playful or instruct the content of the subject.

Moreover, what I understood was that she lacked confidence and was not comfortable being observed since she did not implement an active learning approach. Moreover, the act of the children during the class hour implied that teacher-dominated pedagogy seemed against the developmental needs of kids. In connection with this, Siraj-Blatchford (2009) witnessed that early childhood education needs to be carried out through shared playful activities. Singer (2015) added that in the early childhood educational settings “play and learning go hand in hand in young children” (p. 27).

On the other hand, the classroom condition at Tesfa ECCE center (an urban site center attached to primary school) was likely better organized and managed. At least, the presence of

some still pictures together with letters and numbers could make sense. Besides, the classroom walls were painted with pictures from their textbooks. This seems a positive image offered to the subsector to some extent. It might also open up the child's motivation to spend some time looking at the pictures so that learning would take place.

Most importantly, from my school observation, I learned that children were keen on efficiently utilizing their outdoor playtime. I think they may draw some lessons. For example, likely, two male children whom I observed during my school visit explored the direction of the wind, the power of the wind, and so on. Similarly, another group of children was found while filling the empty plastic bottles with air, seeming to discover whether air occupies space or something else. Likewise, they may develop other life skills such as how to live with others, respecting rules, following procedures, teamwork, tolerance, and many more.

Furthermore, as far as my observation was concerned, rural ECCE centers possessed adequate and conducive playgrounds. This was one of the positive elements I observed when I compared the public ECCE centers to private ECCE centers found in the urban sites. Therefore, when time permits, the poorly utilized playgrounds of the current rural sites might be better employed. In contrast, it is also worth noting that almost all urban ECCE centers I observed had been operating in congested compounds, where most of them used rented private houses built for other purposes. Above all, the aforementioned descriptions symbolized the role of play in creating dependable, creative, and competent citizens of the future.

Perhaps due to the aforesaid reasons, the ECCE centers under investigation were ill-equipped with necessary play materials. The schools were characterized by the non-existence of indoor and outdoor play materials. The school administrators compounded this and practitioners' negative attitude towards the contribution of play in the ECCE center children as some of the school members considered 'a time spent playing as a time wasted. This could be one of the

reasons that the teaching and learning processes of the ECCE centers were not accompanied by playful activities (indoor and outdoor).

Overall, the subsection attempted to explore the ECCE center children in terms of the playfulness of the learning environment and the prevailing attitude towards play. Following my prior belief, the employed qualitative approach enabled me to come up with the findings discussed in the preceding sections. For the most part, the empirical materials from the interview and my observation revealed that a playful learning environment was almost non-existent; the play was poorly perceived via the lens of the school community. Consequently, play-based pedagogy seemed squeezed out; the absence of indoor and outdoor play materials characterized the study sites. Similarly, among other things, the underprivileged teachers working conditions, lack of child-friendly seating facilities, and classroom conditions were not up to the standard. These also made learning a laborious business together with the disappearance of play from the school life of ECCE center children.

**4.1.7.1.3 The Merger of “O”-Class Children of Different Ages.** The merger of “O”-class<sup>2</sup> children of different ages appeared as one of the pedagogical roadblocks in the proper operation of ECCE. This is one of the inescapable, loudest, and persistent voices of participants of the present study. Specifically, participants from the public ECCE centers consensually reported that children ranged from four to eight years old were merged to receive the same kind of education in a classroom. However, theories of learning complements the merger of children of different ages at least for two reasons. First, multigrade classrooms are emerging good practices in more recent

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<sup>2</sup> “O”-class refers to preprimary education attached to primary schools. It is a formalized early learning immediately preceding primary school. Currently, “O”-classes has been representing *preschools, Early Childhood Care and Education institutions, and kindergartens owned by the Government*. It is believed that the center extends its services on the cognitive and socio-emotional development for children of the appropriate age (4 to 6 years old). The “0”-class (Zero-class) was abandoned not to represent the practices of preprimary education as it connotes a negative meaning (Oromia Education Bureau, 2018).

years. Second, developmental appropriateness is not determined by avoiding multi-grade children in one classroom. It is possible that children belong to the same age and yet we can have a developmentally inappropriate practice. It is about designing the task and then offering it in an individualized way that makes it a developmentally appropriate practice.

A new idea that has emerged from the interview with public ECCE centers was the inappropriateness of the merger of O-class children of different ages. The comments made by two participants (Kedija and Hana) may make the emerged view more clear. Despite accepting the presence of the practice, these participants also seemed to strongly stand against the practice, as evidenced in the statement from their interviews. Pertaining to this, Kedija unfolded:

The biggest problem of our preschool is the merger of children of different ages (4, 5, and 6 years old) in the same classroom. We do not have the ECCE classification such as nursery, lower kindergarten (LKG), or upper kindergarten (UKG). Yet, the preschool has to serve children of the locality based on their ages (4, 5, and 6 years old). The 4 years old children should be placed in one group called nursery; the 5 years old children should be assigned to another group called lower kindergarten, and the 6 years old children should be placed in another category called upper kindergarten. Following the aforementioned classification contents of their respective curriculum should be delivered.

When she was asked about how children could be promoted to the next succeeding column (column of age 4 to the column of age 5; column of age 5 to the column of age 6; and column of age 6 to grade one) as there were no nursery, lower kindergarten, and upper kindergarten, Kedija replied:

Yes, we have been doing the promotion every year along with the columns of the classroom. The first column (age 4) is moved to the next column (age 5); the second

column (age 5) is also moved to the succeeding column (age 6), and finally, children of age 6 and above joins grade one.

In this vein, when Kedija was asked to have further clarification, she said:

Yeah, there is no way to promote children from nursery to lower kindergarten; from lower kindergarten to upper kindergarten, because we do not have the scheme in practice.

Children of age six are promoted to grade one but if a child is found incompetent, they will resend him/her back to us (the “O”-class).

Albeit discussed earlier, Bikila, Kedija’s school principal also reported that the “O”-class children were awarded a certificate of promotion. He said, “Regardless of attending courses in the same classroom, at the end of the year, in June, we prepare report cards for each child and certify them as if they are ‘truly’ promoted from one level to the next level. “In her much-elaborated response, Hana shared Kedija’s view about the situation in the following manner:

What we are doing is not right; it is against the developmental needs of the child. For example, four years of age child should learn through play with his/her age group. They should not sit like a mature child in a classroom for a long period and forced to attend irrelevant courses that are beyond his/her capacity. Now they are listening while other groups (a group of five years of children or a group of six years and above) are receiving some lectures. I think it may destruct the psychological or emotional and physical wellness of the child and is counterproductive. Had it been offered as per the standard in separated classrooms the children would fetch the intended benefits. We (including myself) have reported the severity of the problem to the leadership but surprisingly they told us to continue until the problem is fixed. They woreda education office also informed us of the

availability of the ‘merger’ in other government schools to tell us the practice is business as usual. In any case, to date, it remained one of the unanswered key questions.

Regardless of the ECCE policy intention of 2010, my school observation was found to correspond to the above-cited views. The intent of the readiness program or the “O”-class was to create some sort of schooling background and learning experience and improve the child’s primary school engagement by narrowing the possibly created learning gap (especially for children from the poor family).

Correspondingly, as discussed earlier and as per my observation, children of four, five, and six years old are admitted in the same O-classes and spend more than one-year attending O-classes. The practice may inappropriately lead to the negative psychosocial, cognitive, and emotional development of children and to the extent that these children might observe education as a boring and pointless endeavor. The following description from respondents’ interviews is more or less similar reflections of the situation. To this end, Sara’s observation is more telling:

Surprisingly, as opposed to the developmental needs of children we have been offering courses for all age group children violating both the theoretical and practical child-learning policies. We have all ages in a single classroom viz., four, five, six years of age, and even beyond that. This is one of the difficult jobs that have been practiced in this center. As you could observe later the classroom is organized into three rows (four years old row, five years old row, and six years old and above rows). It is extremely difficult to offer courses for all this group of students and it is totally out of the intention of the ECCE policy.

However, we have been undertaking as it is merged. Indeed, this is not new for the center. We have been implementing it for the past four years. Amazingly, this is carried out with the full knowledge of the woreda education office. When we think of the developmental

nature of children, it is unacceptable and erroneous. Under normal circumstances, a childhood educator could not think of the education of this sort, where, different age group children sit together and getting confused every morning (2:00 to 6:30 local time) by the name of education.

Therefore, conforming to the above-mentioned evidence, except to implement the acceptable multigrade or multiage teaching one must not combine children of different ages (4 to 8+ years) in a narrow and didactically structured classroom to merely offer courses in a row using the lecture method regardless of their developmental maturity.

Furthermore, Bikila, one of the interviewed principals calls the situation “the other mumps on a goiter” while reporting the magnitude of the problem. Specifically, he seems much worried about the large class size as well as the shortage of both human and other resources demanded to properly run the program. He said:

Imagine, how come a teacher serves 70-100 children of different ages? This is a huge job. We have been doing what we can do. The other ‘mumps on a goiter’ is the lack of a teacher and an assistant teacher. If we had an assistant teacher, for example, we might isolate at least the four years children and treat them separately. The other problem lies in the shortage of classrooms. I think the school has planned to build additional classrooms by next year.

For the same interview question, Olyad, the other school principal, agrees. He disclosed:

I completely agree with what the ECCE policy document is saying. However, you will be surprised if I tell you the class size of “O”-class children. During the time of an experience-sharing program held between ECCE centers, we have seen the class size of other preschools, it is by far lower than ours, and I should say incomparable (8 to 131). As one of the participants of the program rightly said, if we have categorized them based on their age

and the official class size of 30, it could be awesome. In my school, the mixed group of children, which cater to 131, is found in a difficult situation. Typically the youngest (the age four) children are found in a desperate situation because they look for special attention and care. Everybody (the woreda education office and the school leadership) knows as all these children (131) have been gathered in a classroom under a single teacher.

Another teacher interview participant, Hana's remark further cemented the intensity of the problem. She further illuminated:

Playing with children and teaching them is what most pleased me. However, teaching 50-60 children of different ages in the same class is disappointing. Besides, the absence of play materials and spending too much time (2:00-9:30 local time) in the school with a small salary is the other absurd.

In a like manner, in my observation, I witnessed that crowded "O"-class children of different ages were attending their education in a limited space. As a result, there was a severe competition over classroom resources such as chairs, desks, teaching materials, and so on. During my observation, I learned that the youngest children of the group were deprived of the caretakers' attention. The youngest children were also forced to interact with the oldest ones who were not on the same footings to live with the so-called give-and-take sort of balanced relationships due to differences in age. In brief, the merger of children of different ages might expose them to physical and psychological harmful incidences if multigrade or multiage approach of teaching is not implemented.

To put it another way, as cited in Chapter 2, Dewey and Montessori's child development philosophy, which advocates children's education to be developmentally oriented, seems ill-disposed. The idea is during the very time of human development an age variation between children likely creates variant behaviors and might affect the optimal human development in

multifarious ways. Put it differently, the age composition and the class-size affect the nature of children's interactions. In this context, the idea of merger coincides with the notion of a 'one size fits all' approach, disregarding one of the biological laws of individual differences-the age variation. In this case, it could be difficult to put children at the heart of the proper child development scheme rather it bears resemblance to superficial attempts. Nonetheless, a multigrade or multiage approach works well if properly implemented, indeed this is not happening. Henceforth, to improve the situation, the following points were suggested by Tirunesh, (school principal) and Kebebew (ECCE expert), following one of my follow-up questions posed to them about the school leaders' commitment to counter the challenges. Tirunesh revealed:

I think the government has to give due attention to resolve this problem. In constructing a house, if the basement of the house is not well-founded, the would-be house could not be long lasting or rock-solid. Thus, a child should be properly cared for and educated until six or eight. Otherwise, nothing would come in his/her future practices of schooling. I'm happy to see you conducting research in this area because this could be part of the solution. I am an optimist that the government would address this challenge. In Ethiopia, we should invest in these foundational stages of human development; if not, what do we expect from the coming generation?

Besides, the following account of Kebebew, the ECCE expert, indicates the extent to which ECCE leaders had practiced the merger of children of different ages. He contended:

The leadership is okay. They are looking for some improvement, but I think the problem is associated with a shortage of budget. The question of availing play materials has also long lasted. To my knowledge, the school leader has plans to offset the problem by building additional classrooms and by hiring additional teachers. However, the budgetary bottleneck staggered the situation.

#### ***4.1.8 Challenges of Leadership in Early Childhood Care and Education***

The ECCE programs, particularly the government ones, were hassled by several unresolved teething leadership challenges. The difficulties of ECCE center children who live in two-thirds of the world including Ethiopia would likely stem from a paucity of resources (Hagos & Tefera, 2015). Apparently, in resource scarce nations, it is not easy, if not impossible, to provide good services and promote ECCE children's best interests. The reality on the ground and very specifically, participants of the current study revealed that among the multifarious problems encountered, issues related to pedagogy, administration, structure, and uncaring attitudes were found to be the most important challenges of the ECCE leadership. Data unveiled that there was robust consensus among participants concerning the existence of pedagogical, administrative, structural, and perceptual challenges that were likely to create undue pressures on the proper operation of the system. The following subsections present empirical evidence of the situation in the study sites.

**4.1.8.1 Pedagogical Challenges.** As indicated earlier, enormous pedagogical hiccups underwent in the leadership of ECCE. Among the most important of these: a) lack of professionalism; b) the presence of child-unfriendly learning environment; c) the absence of active learning pedagogy; d) the inadequacy and in most cases the non-existence of indoor and outdoor play materials; e) the patchwork nature of the ECCE curriculum f) the inadequate supply of suitable textbooks; g) the practices of developmentally inappropriate assessment mode can be mentioned. The first four problems cited as a, b, c, and, d are somewhat described at length in this chapter. Despite the existence of quite a number of pedagogical challenges mentioned above, the

last four of these (mentioned in letter e, f, and g above) are addressed in this section because they were repeatedly reverberated by participants of the study.

**4.1.8.1.1 Adopting Foreign Curriculum.** The intention to use a foreign curriculum was one of the observed challenges. The content of the ECCE curriculum is supposed to be home-made and contextually appropriate. Yet, due to the lack of sufficient attention offered to the subsector, it (the preschool curriculum) lacked uniformity and relevance. Though limited in number, published studies ( e.g., Adam, 2020; Haile & Mohammed, 2017) confirm this finding and report that ECCE curriculum lacks consistency and appropriateness. In many cases, it was a patchwork, merely aggregate topics from Western textbooks or so. Apart from that, the use of the English language as a medium of instruction for non-English speaker preschool children was persistent among private and urban-based preschools. In fact, these schools crossed-over the aims of the ECCE policy of Ethiopia. In an interview, a teacher participant, named Liya, for example, shared her view in an elaborated manner about the present ECCE curriculum:

I am so embarrassed, its (curriculum) content has not sufficiently included the Ethiopian culture and traditions. The majority of the contents are copied from abroad. It is against the culture and tradition of Ethiopian children. I have been questioning the relevance of the curriculum for a long time. Even I would be pleased if I get involved in the textbook preparation and offer my input. Let me tell you one practical example, in my previous school the whole course has been offered in English (the medium of instruction was made English by the private preschool). However, all types of schools (including the private ones) and levels of education (from KG to grade 8) are obliged to use the government prepared textbooks written in the local languages under the auspices of the national curriculum. When these children (who have been attending courses in English at the KG level and foreign curriculum) joined grade one they confront a terrible situation due to the complete

shift of the medium of instruction to Amharic <sup>3</sup>. They failed to cope up with children who came from preschools who have been taught in Amharic. They spend a hard time reading and writing in the Amharic alphabet since they had very limited exposure to the course. To your surprise majority of these children are poorly proficient in English itself at least to the expected competency level.

One of the principals, Tilahun, was also far removed from the implementation of the local curriculum particularly on the use of national languages. His emphatic argument favored the use of the English language over the local ones as a medium of instruction. He believed that to offset challenges related to quality education, offering courses in the English language from the very beginning of preschools is important. In his own words:

In my experience over the last eight years, including teaching, I have seen that students who are proficient enough in the English language have been leading a successful life throughout their academic life. Due to this reason, I claim that, if quality education is the requirement of the 21st century, mastery of the English language is necessary. If children are not better exposed to improve their language skills how come they grasp information and make use of it from the vast majority of texts written in English? Therefore, to produce competent citizens offering a single common course (English language) would not serve the purpose. I think that is why English is the medium of instruction in some private preschools; indeed, some of them are doing it undercover, because it is against the government's regulation.

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<sup>3</sup> Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, is among the local languages which have been serving as the medium of instruction for ECE and primary schools (1-8) in Ethiopia.

Likewise, many parent respondents indicated as they preferred the use of the English language in preschools. They seemed directly associate this with the ability to speak, read, write, and listen in the English language with the quality of teaching and learning. For them, their kids' English language proficiency is considered an indicator of effective teaching and learning. Hence, many participants unanimously shared the following opinion forwarded by Diribe, a 34 years old mother.

She elaborated:

My dream is to see the success of my children. I wish to have competent children with better English language commands. Alike myself, I can tell you that many parents are looking for better preschools, I mean a school which uses English as a medium of instruction. Yet, the problem is, you cannot find schools with sufficient English language courses unless you moved to urban sites. I am not happy with the currently offered courses, where almost all of them are delivered only in Afan Oromo. It could have been fine if some English courses are included like the urban-based preschools. Otherwise, if the current situation sustains, it could cause variations between rural and urban-based children in their future academic achievements. For example, if you ask me, my seven years old child, who is admitted three years ago at this preschool you would be surprised, he neither read nor write English of his level.

**4.1.8.1.2 Inadequacy of Suitable ECCE Books.** As reported by respondents, suitable ECCE textbooks and other reference materials (e.g., storybooks, picture books, work/activity books, and teachers' guides) were in short supply. The books needed to deliver the program-lacked uniformity and unevenly distributed, and children rarely got textbooks prepared as per the standard. Furthermore, not all teachers had appropriate guidebooks as envisioned in the program design. The problem was even worse at public ECCE centers. There was also serious nonexistence of culturally

relevant storybooks, given the plethora of child stories in society. The quotes from respondents' interviews presented as follows are evidence of the situation. For instance, Sara, a veteran ECCE teacher, described:

We do not have sufficient books. We are in desperate need of textbooks and other supplementary children's books (e.g., storybooks, picture books). The school is also in a position to purchase these books but the problem is, you cannot find them from the market. Children's textbooks and related reading materials are in short supply from both sides (the government and the private sector).

Abebe, one of the participants' PTA members, further illuminated the desperate need for teaching materials including ECCE books. He noted that to address child-related learning resources child related books and other teaching materials should be readily available. He said:

If this program (ECCE) is part of the government, the government should be part of the solution. It is the responsibility of the government to avail textbooks, teachers teaching materials, and other children reading materials for the nursery, lower KG, and upper KG students and their teachers. On the other hand, if you look at some private preschools, which are found in Addis, where the upper-class people send their children are equipped with sufficient and varied types of teaching and learning materials including books. This happens due to the availability of resources. In our case, unless the government fulfills these shortages there is no way to tackle the problem. Providing books should be the responsibility of the government at least for the government preschools.

In the same way, Tiyu, a teacher participant commented:

With regard to the preparation of KG books, it is not the government that prepares the book. Mainly it is prepared at the school level mostly by KG teachers. I do not think the book (the nursery book, in my case) is relevant to our culture. There is also a dearth of culturally

relevant storybooks, given plenty of child stories in society. According to my observation, the book is organized with bulky and difficult topics that do not coincide with the child's level of understanding.

In summary, the above-mentioned Tiyu's statement was congruent with both Abebe and Sara's comment. They highlighted that the ECCE books should be carefully developed in a way it paints a positive picture about own culture and value system. In addition, it should be developmentally appropriate. These findings suggest that the preparation and distribution of child-friendly books should be made possible via the active involvement of the government.

**4.1.8.1.3 Lack of Child-Friendly Assessment Mechanisms.** As per my document analysis and observation, the assessment mechanisms that had been employed in preschools seemed not developmental and age-appropriate. For instance, the result of my document analysis on the students' report card and students' mark list (roster) of the first semester of 2018/19 illustrated a marked variation between private and public preschools mode of assessment. In one of the observed private preschools, children were assessed through tests and exams for 100%, where test 1 and test 2 accounts for 30%; mid-exam covers 20%; and the remaining final exam caters to 50%.

Yet, following the same pattern, in an observation made in another public preschool, students were assessed rather using both continuous and summative assessment modalities (e.g., test 1& 2 added up to 20%; class participation 10%; homework 10%; classwork 10%; mid-exam 25%; and final exam 25%). In short, except for the course called 'Art', the entire evaluation mechanism was made solely with a series of written tests and a final exam. In both types of preschools, children were commonly assessed for mother tongue language, English, Mathematics, and Environmental Science courses.

On the other hand, exceptionally, in some private preschools, eleven courses such as Amharic, English Grammar, Communicative English, English Handwriting, Math in Amharic,

Math in English, Environmental science in English, Environmental Science in Amharic, IT, Art, and Sport were offered. The interview with participants also revealed substantive and mixed feelings regarding assessment, as can be understood from the quotes taken from the interviews.

Regarding this, Hana, the teacher participant, had this to say concerning children's assessment:

With respect to exams, I am doing it simply because of parental pressures. We are providing tests simply to comply with parental needs. As far as my training is concerned, the exam is not allowed for children at this level. Their assessment should be related to their differing practical activities such as rewriting letters or words, observing their reading competency, looking at the way they spell numbers or letters, and so forth. The exam administration syndrome comes from the private schools, where parents consider them a benchmark of good teaching. For example, in my case for the last five years, I have administered a sort of test for the first time in October 2019 due to parental influence. During the prior years, I used to evaluate them using the child's participation (e.g., classroom, indoor and outdoor games), classwork, homework, overall interaction, and age of the child were considered as promotion criteria. Bear in mind, our (teachers) job is not to put pressure on the child's learning instead to create a child-friendly learning environment where we assist children and make them love education.

Similar to Hana, Sara also expressed the ill implementation of a developmentally appropriate assessment modality. Her account is more telling:

After I taught my UKG students, I have been assessing them, using tests out of 60% and a final exam for the remaining 40%. The parents are also happy about it. My friend also assesses her LKG students the same way. This is one of the commonly practiced experiences of this school.

A more or less similar view is held by Liya. Regardless of the applicability of a series of tests, she shares her observation on the procedures of the reward system and promotion mechanisms. She described her experience as follows:

We do not have a reward system for preprimary school children. Besides, no child's status is determined as a failure as long as they spent the whole year in the placed level. In other words, except for the dropouts, all the admitted children are eligible for automatic promotion. However, for the sake of formality children of nursery and lower KG students are graded in letters (B, A, and A+), whereas, children of UKG students are evaluated using figures out of 100%. We give them a series of written tests to grade them and comply with the predetermined status (the automatic promotion).

**4.1.8.2 Administrative Challenges.** Despite Orkin et al.'s (2012) claim, a study conducted on ECCE in Ethiopia, which stated the remarkable strides made in access to ECCE education, participants of the presnet study unanimously reported numerous administrative challenges. An empirical data garnered from observations made during the interviews and document review illuminated the next key challenges related to administration. The observable administrative challenges were related to incompetency and lack of solemn commitment of human resources surrounding the ECCE program (lack of responsible body); lack of budget; the problem of physical resources; inadequacy of material resources; the existence of unreliable quality assurance and licensing mechanisms; and lack of monitoring and evaluation to mention few.

To be more specific, among other things, lack of qualified preschool teachers and principals, and other support staff including ECCE experts; the poor salary scale of preschool workers; the non-existence of ECCE policy documents (particularly at the grassroots level and if it exists, the materials are poorly grasped); lack of awareness about the worth of ECCE; the absence of standard curriculum; the narrow school compound; the large class size; the problem of the

adequate playground; poor latrine; absence of dining room can be cited as the most severe challenges. The following quotes from the interviews are illustrative of the situation. For instance, Kedija stated her observation as:

There are manifold challenges. Inadequate ECCE budget; insufficient classrooms; shortage of principal teachers and assistant teachers; lack of play materials; poor teacher's salary; high teacher's turnover; absence of scholarship program for ECCE teachers. There is also a desperate scarcity of indoor and outdoor play materials. Compared to the urban-based preschools the problem is more persistent in government-owned preschools.

Similarly, the mismatch between the amount of pay and the workload was seen in Genet's narrative when she said:

ECCE teachers' salary is very low as a result; we have been leading a horrible life. There is a mismatch between what we have been doing here and the amount of salary paid for our contribution. Almost it is like doing it for free. We spent quite a lot of time in school doing a lot of tasks. We come here early in the morning at 1:30 LT (local time) and stay here until 9:30 LT. We spent the whole day working for this school to your surprise we do not have another income.

Alike Kedija and Genet's views, Emebet, one of the ECCE experts, reiterated:

If you ask me, I can tell you many challenges related to the well-functioning of preschools. For instance, there is a lack of spaces for learning and play. The classrooms are overcrowded; many of the rented KGs lack spaces for indoor and outdoor activities. Similarly, there is a problem with appropriate and well-ordered playground materials; toilets are not child-sized. Surprisingly, there is no difference between the elementary school and the preschool children's chairs and desks. From the point of policy material, in

some private preschools, I could see the misuse of the national child curriculum or the use of an Indian origin curriculum.

On top of that, the introduction of different school charges (often without sufficient economic reasons) was the visible voices of preschool parent participants of urban-based private preschools. Regarding this, Admasu, one of the parent's committee members, expressed:

Every academic year the school (Selam) unreasonably added tuition and admission fees. Besides, there is an unfair price attachment on the school-made textbooks, uniforms, graduation bulletins, and so on. In any case, you are forced to submit to what comes from the school for the sake of your children.

Again, though not sufficiently reported, given the nature of child development, preprimary school children's disciplinary matters could be prudently managed to develop desirable behavior as much as possible. Relating to this, Liya, a teacher in a private preschool, reported that at an early stage of human development, if disciplinary problems are left to chance, it may trigger disobedience and erode the proper development of a child. That was not, however, a view readily shared by other members. Apart from that, how about looking into her extended actual words:

I believe that parents should nurture their children with their norms and value system. However, the '*don't punish a child*' remark is one of the challenges of the day at its face value. I'm not advocating a violent treatment of a child but am in favor of a simple scold (the educative one, which is implemented with all the necessary precautions). Otherwise, simply ignoring punishment once and for all for every act of a child may lead to the uneven treatment of the child. And gradually a child may develop irresponsibility. Besides, a child may not be accountable for his/her own acts, run after foreign cultures at the expense of his/her own culture and identity. At length and on the larger scale this, in turn, may create a sort of groupthink between and among members of the community. The manifested

groupthink may yield a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of the society by obstructing a peaceful and rational interaction between and among nationals to the extent of eroding their national identity and patriotism. Currently, if you look at some children they have been manifesting morally unacceptable behavior (*mirin yalu meren yehonu lijoch alu*).

She added:

If you ask me in the Holy Bible or in the Holy Quran what is said is do not hurt a child but punish them to correct their evil deeds (*Lijih yibla yiteta atagudlibet inji lijihin kitaw new yemilew mikniyatun meren new yemihonut*). In my opinion, punishment is necessary.

Sometimes what makes me mad in my preschool teaching career is the issue of punishment.

My intention is all about creating and sees a disciplined child. I do not think I have a different purpose other than what parents are looking for. Nevertheless, some parents are extremely aggressive if you touch a child with your fingertips in an attempt to put them on the right track. No matter how the individual is knowledgeable unless the person is disciplined it is worthless. In conclusion, what I said is, a reasonable amount of punishment should be applied. Essentially, it should not impair the psychological or the physical wellness of a child and the intention should be to modify the undesirable behavior.

From the quotes above, one can summarize that parents and teachers have to take care of the discipline of the children. They should teach their rights and obligations. If children do not respect teachers, they do not accept the do's and don'ts of the school. This is not developmental. Obviously, the teaching and learning process could not be undertaken in an environment where the communication process is noisy and tensed up. Besides, it creates misunderstandings. At worst, if the situation is mismanaged in due course children may develop reckless behavior. Therefore, I argue that one of the very crucial assets of our country called *respect* should be restored, if our intention is to create a just and open-minded generation. `

**4.1.8.3 Structural Challenges.** Structural constraints appeared as the third key challenge of ECCE as perceived by participants. Data from interviews and the reviewed ECCE related policy documents (e.g., The National ECCE Policy Framework of 2010) did not explicitly depict the administrative structure of the ECCE subsector. Said it differently, none of the policy documents clearly stipulated about who should lead preprimary education or the ECCE unit, with what qualification and experience, how long, in what ways, for what purpose, and so on. What was observed was a sort of leadership that was confined to the rule of thumb approach. In specific terms, participants of the current study agreed that the encountered structural challenge seemed prone to the public preschools when compared to the private preschools.

**4.1.8.3.1 Independent ECCE Leader.** In an interview with Tirunesh, one of the principals of ECCE, which was attached to the primary school, shared her anecdote about one of the structural problems, referring to the need to have an independent ECCE leader. She indicated that “to be honest, am so much busy with my major responsibility (the primary school principal-ship job). The appended center (the ECCE center) by itself requires an independent ECCE leader.” My follow up question continued: What do you mean when you say an independent ECCE leader? She asserted:

I mean it is not the presence of the leader per se that matters, but to what extent does, that leader has been wholeheartedly engaged in the practices of the institution (e.g., the ECCE center). I think thinking about your core task begins from the very moment of your application. As for this (the ECCE center), no official told me about it but I could see the workload. Therefore, if there is a need to have a robust institution the designation of an independent ECCE leader like the private preschools works well.

Parallel to that, all the interviewed public-owned (ECCE center) principals and teachers were on the same wavelength in describing the need to have separate ECCE leaders. For instance, Kedija, Hana, and Sara had the following reflections. For example, Kedija asserted:

If a job is to be carried out up to the level of an acceptable standard, the availability of an independent and responsible leader is 'invaluable; it is demanding. If the center has an appointed or elected leader, s/he could be curious about the allocated school grant budget for example. s/he (the leader) would undertake the job with a sense of belongingness, ownership, and accountability. I suggest that the woreda education bureau shall assign the ECCE leader who can make the system run as it is intended to function and achieve its desired objectives. With the existing attachment, the ECCE center has inconsiderable attention from the primary school leaders (who are believed to run the ECCE centers as well). Surely, the presence of an independent ECCE leader can improve quite a number of obscures.

Hana echoed what Kedija stated above. She substantiated the need to have an independent ECCE leader. Her blunt remarks such as the following say it all:

If we had an independent ECCE leader, I am optimistic things could not be mismanaged as can be observed. The earmarked school grant fund would properly be utilized. So far, we have no idea about the implementation of the ECCE budget. If we had an independent ECCE leader, s/he could mobilize the community to generate more funds so that the current reality of the center would have another picture.

Sara's lengthy but emphatic narrative tends to summarize what Hana and Kedija unfold. She revealed:

The primary school leader's focus is not towards us (the preschool), it is towards the primary school. We are doing almost everything based on our interests by ourselves.

Sometimes we have been requesting them (the principals) what should they support. Except for some material supports, they could give us superficial orders and guidelines.

Following my probe, *why that (superficial)?* She clarified:

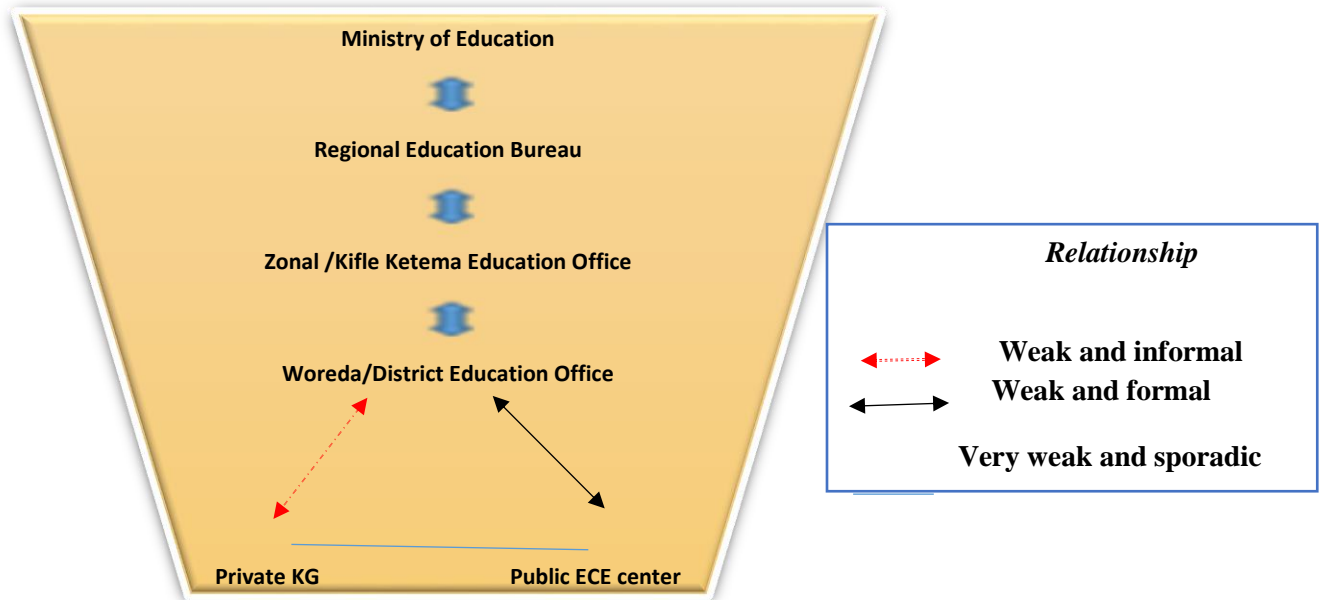
I think the ECCE is separated from primary school though it is an attachment. Thus, it calls for a separate leader. It has to have a separate ECCE leader who knows the nature of the subsector. The school leader has limited knowledge of ECCE. If you ask me, for example, they have no idea about the daily teaching schedule; it is we (the teachers) who prepare and have been executing it. The school leader is good enough in matters related to the primary school; even I doubt their understanding pertaining to the dos and don'ts of the preschool. They are almost ignorant of the preschool. Therefore, to have a robust preschool an independent preschool leader shall be assigned.

**4.1.8.3.2 Weak and Intermittent Relationship.** A close examination of the garnered data predominantly revealed the manifestation of a weak and sporadic relationship between the urban-based preschools and the woreda and/or the CRC level education officers. Contrastingly, participants reported the availability of relatively better communication between government-led ECCE centers and woreda education officials. In connection with this, in a discussion held with Emebet, one of the ECCE experts, she admitted as there was a loosely connected work relationship between the education offices and the ECCE centers. She said, “There is almost no relationship between our offices and the preprimary education sector; if any, our contact is delimited to collect the annual statistical reports and often informal. At worst, poor technical assistants were provided for these institutions.”

Equally important, the probable cause for the weak, sporadic, and informal relationships between private preschools or public ECCE centers and woreda/district level education office was likely associated with the non-existence of an independent ECCE leader, especially at the public

ECCE centers. The following Figure 4, may visualize the extent to which the administrative relationship occurs particularly at the grassroots level.

**Figure 4: The Current ECCE Administrative Relationship**



**4.1.8.4 Attitudinal Challenges.** Of all the observed ECCE, leadership defies attitudinal challenges that may be considered the thorny issue. Based on the information obtained from participants, four sub-themes emerged here. The sub-themes that gave rise to the proliferation of attitudinal challenges entail a) Failure to trust the home-made ECCE curriculum; b) inadequate government attention conferred to the program, and c) insufficient parental engagement towards the ECCE program. The details are given below.

**4.1.8.4.1 Failure to Trust the Home-Made ECCE Curriculum.** Observations and interviews confirmed the existence of loss of trust and downplayed ECCE curriculum. Unfortunately, there were no binding conditions set in the ECCE policy document of the nation neither to trust nor to authorize the ECCE curriculum of foreign origin. ‘Why some private preschools failed to trust the home-made curricula and developed an outward look to plant the

foreign curriculum in the home soil?’ could be one of the questions one may ask him/herself and others being an education expert from the recipient end. For example, Kebebew, one of the three ECCE experts with an education background has the following elaborated reflection:

In my opinion let alone the ECCE curriculum our entire education systems curriculum is not far removed from foreign influences. So far, in my experience, our curriculum developers have been doing a copy-paste job. You cannot find a visible difference between the foreign-made textbooks and the textbooks developed by the local experts. When I see the contents of the textbooks and almost all the reference materials are imported from abroad. I also believe that English, one of the international languages, is one of the key instruments that help us to easily explore and understand knowledge created at some point and disseminate elsewhere where needed. Therefore, in my opinion, the probable reason for our failure is the problem of not using the foreign curriculum as properly as possible. To be frank, all the books and subjects throughout our history are imported from abroad, which one is ours? I think that could be the main reason when some schools openly implement the foreign curriculum and language the education experts kept silent instead of correcting it. In the process of curriculum development, I think the commonly propagated concern ‘contextualization or localization’ is utilized mainly for political reasons. In practice what you can find is different-the decontextualized patchworks.

While this may be true, others (e.g., Mohammed, an expert interviewee) called the situation to be, “the English language syndrome.” Mohammed affirmed, “For the success of a given child what matters is not only the acquisition of English language but also the equally important development of his/her indigenous knowledge and culture.” He added:

An avalanche of urban-based parents including the elites liked to send their children to schools where the medium of instruction is English. They believe that from the very

beginning of the KG level if their kids have got access to attend courses in the English language they do feel that it would guarantee their academic success in the future.

Additionally, Liya, the veteran private preschool teacher agreed with what Mohamed stated above, she reported:

There is a desperate need for parents to see their kids speak good English. However, I strongly believe that instead of pushing children to grasp the foreign language (English) it could have been awesome if children prioritize their local languages so that reared in their own culture. If children are grown up with their traditions, I hope they would become more disciplined and regard their national identity.

**4.1.8.4.2 Flimsy Government Attention.** Based on the available data lack of government attention was among the frequently stated ECCE concerns. Irrespective of the important document, the National ECCE Policy Framework of Ethiopia, which envisaged government intentions and commitments to realize its goals and missions, the currently experienced service delivery lacked due concern. For instance, Kedija articulated:

Early childhood education is one of the extremely underemphasized sectors of government. To give you a concrete example, if you look at the stores including our schools you can see an excess amount of text-books, teachers guide, syllabuses, and other reference books published by the government. The majority of these books are new and are not in use since they are found to be superfluous. In contrast, ECCE children have nothing to use. It seems to me children of the ECCE centers and their respective teachers are found to be none of their (government) business. Despite the dire need for other equally important material resources, where is the book? Is it not important? How can we teach them? And, how can they learn? Likewise, we have no supervisory support; usually, we come across supervisors when there are celebrities.

She added:

As I said repeatedly offering sufficient ‘attention’ to the subsector is mandatory. As it exists today authorities of education who are working at different tiers (from the school to the ministry of education) are not concerned about the program. I have observed countless heartbreaking things, I can say nothing is done for the education of the child by the powers of education (national, regional, and local). It is not because of a lack of capacity and lack of resources, but it is simply because of their failure to give attention. To exemplify, when we remind or ask school leaders what has to be done for the ECCE, although the idea is good enough they undermine our opinions.

In response to my questions, “Have you observed that any of the three signatories (ministry of education, ministry of health, and ministry of women, youths, and child affairs) of the ECCE program visited this center? If so, how often?” Tiyu, firmly confided, “So far, no organization has visited our center except some superficial contact from the ministry of education.” She added:

I don’t think the government knows preschools, maybe these days (*with hesitation*). I have no idea whether the government considers preschools or not. I probed, *why do you say that?* I did not see a preschool staff participated in any of the government meetings to talk about preschools. I did not remember the time when the government is truly concerned about the private preschools. If preschool is the center of government attention, it could provide child-oriented books and play materials. With regard to books, I have a big question. If you look at the stores of some primary schools, their stores are filled with excess textbooks. It is a paradox for me if ECCE is truly the business of the government where is their books both for the children and for their teachers among other things.

Alike Tiyu, Hana's concern related to the shortage of ECCE books could further illustrate the low key given to the ECCE program. She asserted:

Teaching without books is disappointing. You do not know what to do; most of the time you remain busy with unplanned and haphazard jobs. In my case, I am teaching the Afan Oromo speaking children without books prepared for them. As a way-out, I spent quite a lot of time translating the ECCE books prepared in Amharic language to teach the Afan Oromo speaking children. For me, the translation job is found to be the most difficult.

Consequently, I have reported the problem to the school leader; however, due to the poor concern given to the ECCE program, the problem is not yet addressed.

Another teacher interview participant, Sara's comment on teachers' deployment appears confirmatory for the government authority's flimsy attention. She uncovered:

Apart from this, there is a problem pertaining to teachers' deployment. For instance, one of my staff members was trained in Afan Oromo but now she is assigned to teach in Amharic. Similarly, I am trained in Afan Oromo and assigned to teach in Amharic. This is a mismatch because we were trained to teach in Afan Oromo but actually what is in place is different. I think this causes a problem particularly on the quality of the job. I guess this happened partly due to the recklessness of the school leadership.

As was perceived by my personal observation and a discussion made with participants, poor government attention seemed to be the order of the day. Abebe further substantiated the issue as:

Most of the time they (the school leader) focus on primary school (1-8). They (the school leader) consider the preprimary school not as an attachment but as an extra burden. We (teachers, my colleague, and myself) have been doing the best of what we can in the preprimary school. Yet, the school leaders spent almost their whole time 'talking and

walking' about the primary school. Honestly speaking, their (school leaders) dedication is towards the primary school.

In conclusion, as illustrated in the findings above the role of the government in support of the ECCE program seems still largely absent.

**4.1.8.4.3 Insufficient Parental Engagement in the ECCE Program.** As regards to parental engagement, participants reported that lack of awareness, shortage of time, and lack of rendering full responsibility for their child's education to preschool teachers or preschools seemed to be among the commonly observed challenges. In some interviews, parents associated that when they sent their kids to preschools, there was an inherent belief that the physical, social, intellectual, and emotional well-being of the youngster resides at the mercy of the preschool staff. The following remarks made by the interviewed participants can show inadequate parental attitude towards the ECCE program. Here is Hana's observation:

The improper parental attitude towards their child's education is one of the inhibiting factors of the ECCE leadership. According to my experience, parents seem to have a limited understanding of the purpose of ECCE education and the roles to be played by themselves and the preschools. For instance, parents believe that if children spent most of their time playing; they tend to judge as if they are not learning. In order to meet the parents' expectations (to see their children are doing some arithmetic, writing, and reading) I think we (teachers) are also pressurized to go for drills. Consequently, when I talk of the current situation of this school lack of parents' involvement creates a gap to be filled via training and further communication platforms.

Similarly, Sara detailed the lack of parental awareness about the value of play, for instance. She stated:

In my opinion, parents are looking for quick development of literacy and numeracy skills. Previously parents were presenting this question repeatedly but now we have created an awareness creation meeting on the benefits of play. In September 2019, I gave a strong note about the educational value of play. For example, we could not give exercise books and pencils to the nursery class children in their first five months after admission. This is because at this stage what is expected of them is too much play to develop their relationship skills and attract them towards the school. We have sufficient teaching aids to give them more opportunities to learn through play for example to construct blocks and identify letters.

Halima, one of the parents' committee members, also revealed her perception. She said: I have no doubt about the preschool teachers' role in that they (teachers) could enable children to develop all the necessary knowledge and skills. Above all, I love to see children speak, read, and write in good English. This is because I believe that the ability to speak commendable English could be regarded as one of the signs of the manifestation of quality education in a given school.

Despite the abovementioned parental expectations, if parents failed to closely work with preschools, a gulf between their expectations and reality seems observable. Apart from that, Liya, one of the teacher participants, shared her views about the value of parents' participation in the process of their children's education, as in the following quote:

The school community has a good relationship with parents. There are also some busy parents who are not easily accessible due to the nature of their job and even who can't afford sufficient time for their children at home. When we come across such parents we call them here at school once a week or in two weeks' time and resolve issues pertaining to their children's condition....It has a couple of advantages to developing a child's behavior. For

example, appreciable amounts of students were sleeping in the morning school section due to watching too much TV every night. Some children also tend to manifest some misbehaviors to their colleagues which they have learned from the irrelevant TV programs (e.g., tragedies, fights, and or 'kana film', a film translated in the Amharic language from one of the Indian films-believed to consume the majority of their children's time if they are addicted to the programs), might negatively be contributed for their well-being. To illustrate further, if they are addicted to the series of moving pictures they might loosely approach their education. Besides, some of them might come to schools ill-prepared (e.g., without combing their hair because of the morning hour rashness or carelessness of their parents) and other children might develop poor appetite may be due to poor sanitary conditions of their utensils.

Therefore, from what Liya reflected above it can be concluded that among other things, sharing information with parents, and developing a common understanding about the child's situation, and looking for joint decision-making practices likely create a sound childcare spirit and environment.

Summing up, parents could play an indispensable role in the process of childcare and education. Likewise, teachers, who could be regarded as the key players of their second home-the school, are assumed to render a substantial amount of services they demand. Therefore, the link between parents and their teachers could improve the process of childcare and education. More specifically, the extent to which parents appear to engage in the practices of ECCE, the probability of developing well-mannered, reasonable, and an independent child likely occur.

## 4.2 Discussion

The present study sought to explore the leadership of early childhood education in Ethiopia. Even though there are thousands of ECCE centers in the country the study purposefully involved six ECCE centers found in Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa City Administration. The selected region and city administration are among the first top four regions in terms of a high density of children enrollment population in the 4-6 years age group. While Oromia has a child student population of 3,014,441, Addis Ababa has 179,004 (Ministry of Education, 2017). The variation of the sites in terms of Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) is another point of selection. For instance, in GER, Addis Ababa is known for its highest (94%), whereas Oromia has the lowest (38.4%) (Ministry of Education, 2017).

On the word of Waniganayake (2014), ECCE leadership is perceived as “a socially constructed, situational, and interpretive phenomenon” (p.66). Accordingly, qualitative methods seem to better capture what is going on in the context of ECCE. To that end, the ECCE leadership would better be understood by using a qualitative case study. Besides that, in qualitative research the sample size is not an important issue; instead, what matters is the depth and the richness of information obtained pertaining to the unit of analysis (ECCE leaders, ECCE experts, parents, and teachers, as a case in point) rather than the number of samples included (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Njie & Asimiran, 2014). Hence, of the six ECCE centers, four of them are urban-based ECCE centers and the remaining two are located in rural sites. As described earlier, this qualitative case study is grounded in ecological systems theory relying on interviews, observation, and document review as the instrument of data collection. Guided by the five basic research questions mentioned in Chapter 1, this study reveals several important findings concerning the leadership of early childhood education in Ethiopia.

Several topics emerge from the bulk of the empirical material. The detailed data analyses of verbatim transcriptions of interviews with 21 participants including six ECCE center leaders, six ECCE teachers, six parents, and three ECCE experts. These participants represent three government-owned ECCE centers and three private preschools with diverse profiles such as place of work (being rural or urban), work experience of at least three years, sex (for principals), and current position willingly participated in the interview.

To garner data a face-to-face interview was conducted with each participant. The interview data were audiotaped, transcribed, synthesized, and categorized under respective themes for analysis. To explore participants' responses a content analysis was employed to group similar ideas gathered on the same issue (Argyropoulou, 2013; Halttunen, 2013). The analysis of the emerging themes involved coding and categorizing processes to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the responses (Saldaña, 2021). In accordance with the literature (e.g. Al-Omari, 2011; Patten, 2005; Turner, 2010; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010), and in line with the research requirement set by Addis Ababa University interviews conducted with the 21 participants were facilitated by the researcher-myself. In light of the purpose of the study and based on the analyses of the empirical materials presented in the prior section, the discussions are given below under five subsections related to the five research questions restated above: ECCE leaders' assignment, the leadership behavior of ECCE leaders, organizational citizenship behavior in ECCE, the employment of pedagogical leadership in ECCE centers, and challenges of leadership in ECCE.

#### ***4.2.1 Early Childhood Education Leaders' Assignment***

The present study examined how ECCE leaders have been assigned in the principalship posts. To the best of my knowledge, let alone the ECCE leaders' assignment, studies on the ECCE

leadership has received little attention in Ethiopia (Megersa, 2015; Tesfaye, 2019). From what stands now results of this study informs two models of ECCE leaders' assignment.

First, the primary school principals, where the "O"-class centers are annexed to the primary schools, are found to be the default leaders of the ECCE centers. Meaning, the leadership positions of the government ECCE centers fall under the auspices of the primary school principals.

Reviewing ECCE documents of the Ministry of Education (e.g., Ministry of Education, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2013a; Ministry of Education, 2013b; TGE, 1994; ESDP I-V; GTP I & II; GEQUIP) did not specify about how an ECCE center leader should be prepared, assigned, developed and or fired. The consulted documents did not shed light on issues pertaining to the required competency and professional qualities of ECCE leaders.

Nevertheless, in its broadest sense, the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia (1994) as stated in article 3.8, section 3.8.5 of the policy stipulated the following quote: The management of teachers and other educational personnel will be organized, on the basis of professional principles, including professional code of ethics, salary, working conditions, incentives, professional growth, and overall rights and duties (p.30).

In reality, as reported earlier the current practice refutes the very intention of the 1994 Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia pertaining to the scheme of article 3.8, i.e. the educational organization and management. Two competing views have been surrounding when we look at the prevailing trend towards the assignment of these default leaders of the ECCE program or the primary school principals. The first group of participants of this study revealed that the current principals' assignment is found to be merit-based, open, and transparent. Simply put, the primary school principals are assigned based on fair competition; whereas, the second group of participants unveiled the reverse. They contend that among other things, political affiliation, network, and nepotism are found to be the order of the day in the process of ECCE leaders'

assignment. Similarly, the findings of some qualitative studies (e.g., Tekleselassie, 2002; Tesfaye, 2019) correspond that in the Ethiopian context, principalship positions are occupied with the ruling party political affiliation rather than professionals who are suitably qualified. They also called it the ‘unwritten rules’ of the school leadership assignment. Indeed, as indicated in the results section, it is often executed via the mask of the ‘pseudo competition’.

Second, the results of this study uncovered that the ECCE center’s leadership assignment has been undertaken against the notion of professionalism. Albeit there is a dearth of studies in the field in the Ethiopian context Tekleselassie (2002) documented, “the deprofessionalization of school principalship” (p.57). A close examination of the empirical data highlighted that in the private preschools principalship positions have been assumed without necessary qualifications and experiences and with some sort of competition.

Given these circumstances, many participants agree that the provision and promises made by the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of 1994, which underscores the need to have professional education managers at all levels of education, did not set a defined standard for ECCE principalship position. Besides, to date, there is no ECCE principals’ training scheme so that no qualified ECCE principals are in place. As a result, the unprepared principals have been running the subsector.

Additionally, as indicated in the results section, the question of who should likely be the best fit for the ECCE center’s leadership position in terms of gender (Female or Male), favors females over their male counterparts. In support of this, Seong Ng et al. (2013) asserted that affection, friendliness, passion, and sympathy are some of the attributes of female ECCE leaders. My observation also accounts that female principals are found to be more interactive, without bureaucratic stresses, and respect compared to their male counterparts. Due to these attributes, there is no exaggeration if one tends to conclude that female preschool leaders revealed a

commendable leadership behavior in the job of care and management. Contrastingly, the male principals were less polite and rigid. This idea corroborated that of Ozga and Walker (1995), who said in educational contexts, “Women ... run more closely knit schools than men, and communicate better with teachers. They use different, less dominating body language. They seem to be more flexible and sensitive than males” (p. 37).

#### ***4.2.2 The Leadership Behavior of ECCE Leaders***

Another interesting finding observable in the present chapter is the leadership behavior of ECCE leaders in Ethiopia. As indicated earlier in the literature review studying ECCE from the point of leadership requires understanding the existing leadership behaviors. Specifically, the situational leadership theory was considered as an important factor in studying leadership in ECCE (Fox, 2012). This is because different situations demand different kinds of leadership behavior; since one size does not fit all (Northhouse, 2018). Therefore, the present section is grounded on situational leadership theory of Hersey and Blanchard (1982).

The premise of the theory states that effective leadership depends on the situation. The point of Hersey and Blanchard's theory is that employees vary in their maturity levels. Some employees appear low in task readiness than others because of little ability or training, or insecurity; this entails the need to have different leadership approach. Depending on the level of followers' willingness and ability, the leader could adjust her or his behavior accordingly. Albeit many theories of leadership are descriptive, the situational approach is prescriptive. It tells you what you should and should not do in various contexts” (Northhouse, 2018, p.99). Therefore, an ECCE leader has to adapt to his/her specific behavior to fit the situation.

In connection with this, participants of the present study informed that the most commonly exhibited leadership behavior is contingent upon the leader, gender, teachers' maturity, or readiness level, and context-specific. For detailed analysis Hersey and Blanchard's (1982) continuum of

leadership styles which ranges from telling to delegating were employed. As a result, the leadership behavior of the ECCE leaders has been manifested in its various forms including telling, selling, participating, delegating, as well as caring leadership. The details are given below.

As can be realized from discussions made with participants of the current study ECCE center leaders have been displaying the telling leadership behavior as a commonly exhibited leadership behavior. In relation to this at least three key points such as the presence of close supervision, the visible heavy hands of the leader, and the passive roles played by teachers in the process of decision-making activity exemplify the prevalence of the behavior. Besides, the presence of one-way communication and the prevalence of a series of orders accompanied by what to do, how to do, and when to do seem illustrative of the behavior.

Participatory leadership behavior seems the secondly employed leadership behavior in the private preschools. Most likely, the school leader and teachers seem nearly on equal footings on the process of decision-making. Many participants emphatically noted the presence of an open, smooth, and interactive environment. The preschool principals share jobs and have been playing role model on what has to be done in the school. In connection with this one of the female participants reported that her preschool principal set an example for others to follow. Most importantly, the majority of teacher participants are influenced and inspired by their respective principals regarding the use of modeling. This means that how the school principal treats and values people have been depicting principals' considerate, trustworthy, enthusiastic, energetic, humble, fair, and open-minded, and cooperative attributes.

Reports of the participants generally delineate that selling is the commonly practiced leadership behavior. They described that regardless of their leader's attempt to exhibit a sort of participatory leadership style at times they are found to retreat to their accustomed throne, the selling approach. As mentioned by teacher respondents, work-related instructions were

communicated via short briefings and or by holding formal meetings where necessary. Particularly, a close look at the interviewees' responses affirmed that the observed interests of these leaders (the ECCE leaders) towards effectiveness and the manifested positive intentions towards teachers, children, and parents better clarified the selling leadership style. The implication is that throughout the study selling is found to be the most identified leadership behavior.

Hersey and Blanchard's (1982), 'take no action on the part of the leader' has garnered the larger voices of participants selected from public ECCE centers of the present study. The teacher leadership, or hands-off leadership has emerged as a key component of the section from the empirical material. The leadership style manifested in "O"-class centers resemble laissez-faire. The school leader's focus is not towards the government ECCE center or the "O"-class center but it is towards the primary school.

Amazingly, despite their vested power and authority about concerns related to the ECCE center, the default ECCE center principals are ignorant of the ECCE unit; no leader is worried about the early childhood care and education program. As I said repeatedly, no attention is given to the preschool by the school leader. Data from participants and my observation accounted that, ECCE related policy documents are non-existence; even if it exists, no one is worried to access or refer them as guideline, but the good news is some of them know it by heart.

On the contrary, in the same type of ECCE center where the center is led by a female principal the situation was not the same; the leadership style was found to be participatory. Early childhood education was found to be her center of attention. In connection with this, one of the interviewed female principals said, "children born equal; the difference lies on how we treat them." This indicates that the principal of the center seems determined to be a role model, a facilitator, a resource provider, being a change agent, a supporter (personal and technical), and a lifelong learner (Han, 2002).

The interview data made it clear that caring leadership was one of the emergent subthemes and found being the other ECCE centers' dominant leadership behavior. Caring leadership is empirically confirmed in the health sector, leaving the voices of education scholars in this respect unheard. However, as shown in the empirical materials of the present study do not likely entail the absence of a caring leadership style. More exactly, they have been revolved around the theme of caring leadership in different ways. The words *caring* and *principal* or *leader* can frequently be found in conjunction with each other, they are typically not elaborated on or examined in depth. If we take the core elements of caring seriously, “we must consider that the actions, interactions, and practices of leadership are caring” (Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016. p. 319).

With this introductory review in mind, participants of this study shared Louis et al.'s (2016) view with nearly the same degree of intensity. Interestingly, one of the school leaders participants, articulated “my job is one thing; it is caring for the child.” Shortly put, I had the feeling participants unanimously agree with the idea that in preschools caring and leadership are like two sides of the same coin. As can be recalled from discussions made earlier in relation to who should be a preschool leader, the intention of some participants quoted in the results section uncovered a strong association between caring leadership and female leaders since their common denominator appears to uphold a child-friendly learning environment.

It is possible to surmise that caring leadership is a widely undertaken approach in the ECCE centers in Ethiopia, as a leadership behavior. I also believe that the next text pertaining to caring leadership might add value to pay considerable attention to the leadership process of the ECCE sector. The notion of caring leadership has come to the fore since the 1970s from the human caring theory of Jean Watson (Watson, 1988). Since then caring leadership receives huge recognition in the fields of health and education sciences. The issue of care and caring has also gained the currency of health professionals. Due to the more or less similar nature of human dimensions of the

disciplines, viz., intimacy of the necessary relationships and sensitivity to clients care appeared the common denominator of the fields.

Within the context of the above discussion and informed by this understanding, caring leadership could be a potential solution to the ECCE leadership behavior. I believe this is a promising paradigm for the future ECCE leadership. I guess an early time caring may avoid the last time gasp, hence, I suggest caring shall take the precedence. Now since ECCE centers have been striving to bring about a meaningful and holistic change in the coming generation. I think it could be fair to live with the emerged notion called caring leadership style. The currently working leadership behaviors could blend the caring leadership behaviors in ECCE centers as one of the prominent options. To that end, I strongly argue that caring leadership would likely be added into the leadership behavior category of ECCE. My argument is not to take a detour from the existing leadership styles, rather to add more emphasis and glorify caring leadership. Caring is a journey towards the new world. It is an extra mile tour circumscribed by hope and founded on strong moral values of humanity.

To become a flamboyant leader (Watson, 1988) an ECCE leader could likely display caring leadership behavior and might make his/her career's life philosophy. Following his/her, footprint ECCE teachers might also make caring one of the covenants of their professional roles in their daily routines. As a result, in ECCE centers a caring culture, which seems set aside to the periphery, would come back to its true position, the center.

Caregivers likely get motivated on caring for various reasons. First, in education caring is imperceptibly illuminated. It is powerful with regards to addressing both the immediate needs and long-term outcomes of education. Second, the large body of education texts that scrutinizes the purpose of social interactions among leaders, teachers, and students has a direct and an indirect brimming with care and caring. In other words, compared to secondary schools where teachers

contact many students every day, in the ECCE centers no bar potentially prohibits caring. The dyadic, teacher-child relationships set the stage to address both the short- term and long-term needs of a child. Caring is both contagious and retrospective in nature. “Reciprocal interdependency, where one leader’s practice becomes the basis for another leader’s practice and vice versa” (Ritchie & Woods, 2007, p. 364).

One of the key functions of ECCE leaders is promoting a caring learning environment. If these leaders manage to transform caring into behaviors, every person will be treated with respect and dignity. When this condition is easily accessible, a symbiotic relationship will be created. This in turn becomes a trend for everyone working in preschools. In so doing preschools become “*Places for Learning, Places for Joy*”, as Sizer paints in the title of his 1973 book (Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016. p. 321).

As an insider and the one who passed through the career paths of educational leadership from its diploma program down the road to the Ph.D. level, I can witness that caring leadership seems no sufficiently addressed in the curriculum of educational leadership training here in Ethiopia. You harvest what you sow; retrospectively, in my experiential background, I could see where things went wrong. Likewise, findings of the present study revealed that in ECCE centers the practice of unconditional care seems limited. To unfold the progress that needs to be made the whole-hearted commitment of the key players appears crucial.

#### ***4.2.3 Organizational Citizenship Behavior in ECCE leadership***

The results of this study indicated that the extra-role behaviors expected to be realized by the school community such as the ECCE leaders and teachers do not seem uniformly and persistently applied. By way of illustration, the private center leaders appear to display more OCB than the public ones. In a similar comparison, ECCE center teachers were found to demonstrate OCB irrespective of the type of the ECCE center.

The finding indicated that female teachers are more likely to display a behavior that is more consistent with the constructs of OCB. In this sense, OCB seems popular among women leaders. Dunlop (2008) indicated that women leaders prefer 'power for' rather than 'power over' approach of leadership (p.10). The implication is OCB acknowledges collaboration and collectivity since it works well in ECCE settings (Ord et al., 2013). As an illustration of this point, regardless of some hiccups like the small amount of salary, ECCE teachers displayed behavior that surpasses the formal job requirements. Specifically, they (teachers) seem to hold a positive attitude towards the wellbeing of the coming generation instead of complaining about their interests. The displayed genuine concern, intention, and goodwill signify the presence of OCB. This is consistent with related studies on OCB (see Ali & Waqar, 2013; Arar & Nasra, 2019; Atta & Khan, 2015; DiPaola & Hoy, 2005; Nasra & Heilbrunn, 2015). This would mean that female ECCE teachers are found to be helpful and willing to fulfill the overarching goal and values of the center by moving the extra mile as substantiated in Oplatka (2009).

Not to gloss over, a careful reading of the construct OCB denoted that the success of any organization including ECCE centers depends on the effective functioning of OCB. Podsakoff et al. (2000) also augmented that at the back of the success story of any organization OCB appear a potential reason. However, the present study uncovered the reluctance of ECCE leaders in the delivery of OCB. Specifically, public teacher participants of the current study unanimously confirmed that ECCE leaders lack the courage and determination it demands.

Most importantly, for organizations such as ECCE centers to succeed OCB need to be cultivated by the center leader. Seminal studies (e.g., Bateman & Organ, 1983; Williams & Anderson, 1991) and recent works conducted in the sphere of education (Burns & Carpenter, 2008; DiPaola & Hoy, 2005; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Dipaola & Da Costa Neves, 2009; Garg & Rastogi, 2006; Jimmieson, Hannam, & Yeo, 2010; Oplatka, 2006, 2009; Rashid, 2012;

Somech, 2015) firmly traced the contribution of OCB if success is the ultimate goal of an institution. As an illustration of this point, Bateman and Organ (1983) corroborated that OCB is critical to “lubricate the social machinery of the organization” (p. 588). So far, no study has come up with the negative developments of the concept under investigation (Somech, 2015).

Most studies (e.g., File & Shibeshi, 2012; Zeleke & Girma, 2014) in this country have also focused on leadership styles, rather than on leadership from the point of OCB in the context of education. It could also be argued that teacher perceptions of the leaders’ capabilities and their working conditions determine teachers’ OCB. During the past few decades, increased interest in ECCE center leadership has meant that it has become an important component of the ECCE center (Retna, 2011). Nonetheless, studies conducted in Hong Kong (Chan, 2018), China (Zhu, 2009), and Greece (Argyropoulou, 2013) found that majority of the ECCE leaders were rated as ineffective by their teachers. In 2006, a study conducted by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) entitled *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector (ELEYS)* revealed that, “Much of the existing literature on leadership has been overly prescriptive and lacking examples of effective practices” (p. 26). The present study also attempted to reflect ECCE leaders’ reluctance in cultivating teachers OCB among other things.

In agreement with a couple of related qualitative studies (Oplatka, 2006, 2009, 2012), ECCE leaders are found to be crucial in making or breaking teachers’ job appetite, or the OCB. Particularly in today’s climate of heightened expectations, leaders are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. This challenging job requires ability, energy, and commitment, and education offices are often looking for people who can walk on water. Although there has always been the sense that leadership matters, the actual behaviors, and priorities of effective leaders are in a clearer focus now than they have ever been (Chan, 2018). Equally important, the new understanding of the leader’s impact on learning motivates everyone who shares a common

aspiration for all students to attend high-quality ECCE centers. Yet, the point is to what extent do teachers' citizenship behavior is developed and how the leadership influenced the issue is the point to be embarked further.

As a whole, the finding of the current study might provide an opportunity to inform policymakers and education officials of different tiers to aware the benefits of running schools in general and ECCE centers in particular in light of the basic tenets of OCB. This is because among other things one of the fundamental reasons for schools to be effective depends on the willingness of the staff members to go beyond the call of the duty to attain their organization's overarching goals.

#### ***4.2.4 The Employment of Pedagogical Leadership in ECCE Centers***

In light of the results presented earlier, the key dimensions of pedagogical leadership are not in tune with the 1994 Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia and the 2010 ECCE policy framework. In line with this, the following subthemes were emerged from the empirical materials. These include a) the absence of active learning pedagogy, b) lack of playful learning environment, c) the merger of "O"-class children of different ages, and d) the prevalence of unprofessional O-class staff.

The Active Learning Pedagogy. It is surprising to note that active learning pedagogy is not practiced in ECCE centers given the prevailing understanding of the value of the construct by participants of the current study. A gap is found out between what scholars have suggested, what participants of the present study feel important to teach, and what teachers are doing. It seems one of the difficulties inherent in preschool teaching. The following justifications might clarify the possible reasons for not employing the active learning pedagogy. These include the problem of professionalism; class size (being large); shortage of teachers; lack of educational resources (e.g., shortage of books and teachers guide, play materials, teaching aids); over-emphasis on academic

subjects; the presence of irrelevant or sometimes vague curriculum; the absence of teachers commitment; lack of clarity in ECCE goals; and unrealistic parental needs among others. Tigistu's (2013) study confirmed this finding and reported that ECCE teachers seem trained to nurture children through a play-focused approach. In practice, the situation is different. As indicated by one of the respondents of his study, "Parents' demand and expectation is one factor that drives preschool practices towards more work on literacy and numeracy rather than skills associated with social and emotional development" (Tigistu, 2013, p.156).

Participant of the present study are of the same opinion in that the teaching and learning process of the ECCE centers are overwhelmed with lecture methods. Thus, it is worth noting that the finding is consistent with the results of Yizengaw and Tessega (2020), one of the qualitative studies conducted in preschools in Ethiopia. Also, my observation in ECCE centers corroborates the situation. The most compelling evidence of my classroom observations also verified that the mode of teaching delivery was teacher centered. I found that children are made to sit quietly and pay attention to what they are told implying rule of the game. Children had limited opportunity to some sort of child-initiated education or active learning kind of pedagogy in relation to the content of the subject matter. A drill is also one of the extremely widespread pedagogical elements most commonly experienced in ECCE centers. This is in harmony with studies conducted in Ethiopia (e.g., Fantahun, 2016; Teferra et al., 2009). For instance, Fantahun's (2016) study substantiates "academic-oriented content and rote memory and drill are prevalent in almost all preschools as a method of teaching children (p.50)." Likewise, Teferra et al. (2009) found that ECCE teachers possess an inadequate understanding of pedagogical principles on how to care for and educate very young children.

In sum, except insignificant attempts, at both urban and rural ECCE centers, I found similar instances in which the ECCE center teachers implement the academic-oriented approach rather

than play-based pedagogy. The following comment, forwarded by Genet exemplifies the practitioners' poor perception toward the contribution of play-based pedagogy. She revealed "to make children successful I gave due attention to the academic matters rather than play. If you give more opportunities to play they forget education that is why I prefer to focus on academic issues rather than play." This suggests that, one can summarize that ECCE centers have been converted from their active learning program to a structured primary school model.

It could be argued that schooling at early childhood care and education centers seem to form a significant nodal point at which a dependable citizen began to flourish or set a foundation if it is driven by active learning pedagogy. In relation to this, Sage and Baldwin (2012) documented that active learning pedagogy served an inherent pedagogical function. In the same study, they highlighted that preschoolers are responsive to the active learning pedagogy. The cognitive development theorists (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978) also argued that active learning pedagogy offers the child a multitude of opportunities. For instance, when children are made to get involved in a hands-on type of learning a child can construct knowledge and meaning of the world from the environment and his/ her day-to-day interactions. Likewise, a child could be found fair, more reasonable, confident, trustworthy, creative, problem solver, communicative, and keen on social skills such as collaboration, empathy, self-regulation, impulse control, and motivation. The chance to commit a crime, being emotional, and reveal misbehavior is almost nonexistent. In sum, as disclosed by Nicolopoulou (1993) active learning pedagogy has a cognitive and non-cognitive value.

Conversely, children learning in the ECCE environment devoid of active learning pedagogy (be it the global North or the South) can encounter a number of problems (Patte, 2010; Patte & Brwon, 2011). The large volume of academic content provided to ECCE children can let them have a negative impression of education. For the same reason, a child who spends too much of his/ her

time in content-oriented schools may be cognitively prepared but at the same time lack non-cognitive skills such as socialization. That may expose them to anti-social behaviors ranging from stress to commit suicide (Patte, 2010; Patte & Brown, 2011).

**4.2.4.1 The Playfulness of the Learning Environment.** The playfulness of the learning environment and the perception of the school community towards play are found to be more or less similar in the urban and rural ECCE centers. I expected that the playfulness of the school environment and the perception towards play would provide a contrast between the urban and rural centers. However, rather than differences between the two groups of ECCE centers, I found striking similarities along these dimensions. At both ECCE centers, children were expected to spend much of their time sitting in the classrooms and attend a sort of formal course work rather than involving them in play-based activities. Nevertheless, participants of the present study and empirical data from the field observation witnessed the existence of a poorly organized learning environment that goes against the claimed child-friendly learning environment.

To extrapolate, while responding to my questions, how does he/she find the teaching and learning process of the ECCE center, i.e., if the teaching-learning is playful or not, one of the PTSA chairs, whom I have interviewed, implicitly defined '*play as the act of disturbing*' and disclosed his perception toward play. As could be shared by many (e.g., Yizengaw & Tessega, 2020), the purpose of attending preprimary education seems to equip children with cognitive development. Besides, time spent playing is considered a wasted time. In sharp contrast, Henricks (2014) puts it, "*Play is not a trivial endeavor. It is necessary for comprehending what we can be and what we can do*" (*emphasis added, p. 211*). Also, this might be associated with a remedy to lift the academic deficiency, which may be observed in the successive levels of education. Hännikainen, Singer, and Oers (2013) also noted "promoting play is essential for a good life and a better future" (p. 171). At odds, the prevailed knowledge gap about the value of play

could further impose a great deal of resistance to materialize a playful learning environment and the play-driven pedagogy.

On top of the developmentally age-inappropriate practices of learning, the results of the present study indicated a hurried introduction of grade one. That is contrary to what Webb et al. (2013) tell us: children should not be introduced to specific subject matter until they are matured enough to master it. Webb et al. (2013) added that learning came through experience, not rote memorization.

Having this in mind, I'm surprised about the poor attention offered to play materials installed at the playgrounds. Specifically, the extent to which the schools were similar in ignoring the maintenance of play materials found in the school playgrounds. The implication is the employment of play and the creation of a child-friendliness environment is impaired. In other words, in ECCE centers the role of play is poorly perceived by the school community in general and the school leadership in particular. Plus, it seems that children are implicitly prohibited from play as they did not get adequate access to the indoor and outdoor play materials. Correspondingly, the learning environment is poorly equipped with indoor and outdoor play materials and thus children have no choice except to spend their playtime in a de-motivating compound.

Above all, from my position as an observer, the poorly observed subsector was exposed to be treated unfairly by the school management due to lack of attention and shortage of budget. To illustrate, the holes in the wall of the classrooms and the holes in the roof reveals the poor attention given to the ECCE center children in the process of creating a playful and conducive learning environment.

In theory, children are supposed to have well-equipped classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2010); however, the situation at Fikir ECCE center, as a case in point, is even quite discouraging. As indicated earlier, children of the ECCE classes are attending 'the chalk-and-talk' style of

teaching in dusty and hollowed classrooms. Amazingly, during the time of my classroom observations, I did not observe a single play material. Additionally, the act of the children during the class hours implied that teacher-dominated pedagogy seems against the developmental needs of kids. In connection with this, Siraj-Blatchford (2009) witnessed that early childhood education needs to be carried out through shared playful activities. Singer (2015) added that in the early childhood educational settings “play and learning go hand in hand in young children” (p. 27).

Nonetheless, the classroom condition at Tesfa ECCE center (an urban site center attached to primary school) is likely better organized and managed. At least the presence of some still pictures together with letters and numbers could make sense. Besides that, the classroom walls are painted with pictures from their textbooks. The practice somehow indicated the existence of a positive image provided to the subsector.

Furthermore, as far as my observation is concerned rural ECCE centers possessed adequate and conducive playgrounds. This is one of the positive elements I have seen when I compared the public ECCE centers to private ECCE centers found in the urban sites. Accordingly, when time permits the poorly utilized playgrounds of the current rural sites might be better employed. Contrastingly, it is also worth noting that almost all urban ECCE centers I have observed have been operating in a congested compound, where most of them use the rented private houses built for other purposes. Above all, the aforementioned descriptions symbolized the role of play in creating dependable, creative, and competent citizens of the future.

Evidently, play gleams the future of a child; however, participants of the study have mixed perception. This seems mainly connected with the knowledge gap about the benefits of play. It was not considered as a key tool to develop the cognitive and non-cognitive companies of a child. This might be the rationale not to be carried out at the ECCE centers as per the standard it deserves. This is consistent with Tefera and Zewdie’s (2015) study which found out that “many rural parents

believe that play is a waste of time that influences children to be lazy” (p.137). Parallel to this, the exclusion of the preprimary education sector from the budget share of the ministry seems negatively contributed in a host of ways. For instance, lack of indoor and outdoor play materials can be cited as a practice of disregarding the practices of play.

On the whole, the subsection sought to explore the ECCE center children in terms of the playfulness of the learning environment and the prevailing perception towards play. In accordance with my prior belief, the employed qualitative approach enabled me to come up with the findings discussed in the preceding section. For the most part, the empirical materials from the interview and my observation revealed that: playful learning environment is almost non-existent; play is poorly perceived via the lens of the school community. Consequently, play-based pedagogy seems squeezed out; the absence of indoor and outdoor play materials characterized the study sites. Similarly, among other things, the underprivileged teachers working conditions, lack of child-friendly seating facilities, and the classroom conditions are not up to the standard. These, together with the absence of play in the school life of ECCE centers, made learning a laborious business.

**4.2.4.2 The ECCE Staff Professionalization.** One of the themes that emerged from discussions held with participants of the present study includes professionalism. As it stands here, in the ECCE context it is found to be an intriguing point of discussion. Alike other institutions, the ECCE staff professionalization appears to be the *sin qua non* of sound leadership, education, and care system. Strangely, participants uncovered that the ECCE program is overwhelmed by para-professionals, unprofessional and or inexperienced ECCE practitioners and predominantly this is true for rural-based public ECCE centers. Briefly, nearly all participants of the present study expressed that ECCE practitioner’s lack professionalism.

A close observation of the interview data revealed that at the heart of ECCE centers operation the availability of professional staff who can address at least the minimum demands of

children could pave ways to build their future. However, in many cases (as can be understood from participants' quotes mentioned earlier) the marginalized profession and the inadequately prepared ECCE teachers and principals have been running the sector. Referring to the situation Bassok et al., (2013) noted that throughout history, the ECCE workers have been characterized as a poorly qualified, under-paid, and unstable workforce. Parallel to this, Miller (2008) echoed that in England “the early year's employees are under-qualified, poorly paid and predominantly female” (p. 20).

At the worst, a close examination of the empirical material related to the staff professionalization of the available ECCE workers reveals that the very young children (below eight), who deserve developmentally appropriate care and education, are found at the mercy of para-professionals or nonprofessionals. The tradition of assigning any graduate (e.g., 10th grade) to the ECCE sector without specialization is becoming a norm. This is what most commonly observed in the private educational institutions. To exemplify, in some of the observed preschools non-ECCE professionals such as engineers, accountants, information technologists (IT) graduates, human resources managers, and so forth are found rendering services in the positions of leadership and teaching.

On the other hand, while expressing disappointment with the unfavorable conditions accompanying the teaching profession at present, most of the participants, in principle, do not regret having joined the education sector, whether the circumstances are favorable or not. Nonetheless, almost all participants disclosed at least one kind of complaint against the ministry of education. These complaints center on remuneration, lack of opportunities for educational advancement, and the present leadership practices.

This finding is echoed by Tigistu's (2013) who indicated that in Ethiopia the lion's share of the present-day ECCE caregivers and education officeholders had somewhat relevant or irrelevant qualifications. More directly, Hiwot's (2014) study conducted in preschools in Addis Ababa

reported the incompetency of the newly graduate ECCE teachers. By the same token, a couple of studies conducted in Ethiopia (e.g., Assefa, 2014; Gashaw, 2014; Haile & Mohammed, 2017; Hoot et al., 2004; Teferra et al., 2009) cemented the inadequacy of professionally trained ECCE teachers, principals, and experts of the education system. Regardless of some sporadic attempts, no training opportunities are in place for the incumbent ECCE principals and teachers neither by the government nor the private institutions- a finding corroborated in the review of Dunlop (2008).

With this intention, I also argue that the leadership of ECCE should not be underemphasized. This is because, like other levels of the education sector, the leadership of ECCE would play paramount roles. In connection with this, a study conducted by Chan (2018) sheds light on the positive link between ECCE leaders' professional development and its positive outcome. Chan noted a positive relationship between ECCE leaders' preparation and the ability to strike a balance between rules and human considerations in leading their staff members. Also, Kagan and Hallmark (2001) explained that ECCE leadership is one of the greatest professions in the world. For this reason, it needs to be acknowledged. The following list of ECCE leadership roles are also suggested by Kagan and Hallmark: good understanding of child development, valuing cultural diversity, encouraging parent engagement and community involvement, and carefully watching the real rights of children to be children and at times taking risks.

Not to gloss over, Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) revealed that the profession of ECCE is dominated by the feminized workforce. This appears partly true as far as the empirical materials of the present study is concerned. More specifically, in my observation the large majority of the private ECCE teachers seem to be women. However, the scope of the present study should not warrant to report the size of ECCE workforce based on gender.

Overall, I argue that what matters is not which gender dominates the field instead putting children at the center of the table seems worthwhile. Indeed, due to socio-cultural influences

associating the field with female teachers might not be a problem. The problem arises when there is a tendency to give an underdog position for every activity when it is not. When this happens, primarily children will be victimized. Secondly, teachers including, the leader will be underpaid, undervalued, and high rates of staff turnover are likely to be observed. Shortly, the unfair perception attached to the profession could strongly affect not only the proper functioning of the ECCE leadership but also the system.

**4.2.4.3 The Merger of “O”-Class Children of Different Ages.** The merger of “O”-class children of different ages appeared as one of the goiters on mumps in the operation of ECCE. To my knowledge, none of the theories of learning or any of the pedagogical approach complements the merger of children of different ages under eight due to the developmental inappropriateness unless the multigrade or the multiage approach of teaching is to be effected, in this case the intention is not observed rather children are combined for the monolithic type of lecture method. This is one of the inescapable, the loudest, and persistent voices of participants of the present study. Specifically, participants from the public ECCE centers consensually reported that children ranged from four to eight years old are merged to receive the same kind of education in a classroom.

In my observation, I have witnessed that the crowded “O”-class children of different ages are attending their education in a limited space. As a result, there is severe competition over classroom resources such as chairs, desks, teaching materials, and so forth. During my observation, I have learned that the youngest children of the group are deprived of the caretaker's attention. The youngest children are also forced to interact with the oldest ones who are not on the same page both physically and emotionally. In connection with this, Yizengaw and Tessega (2020) argues that a child who lacks to experience age-appropriate activities such as active learning pedagogy is likely to fall short of physical, social, and emotional skills, if not futile. In brief, the merger of children of different ages might expose them to physical and psychological malicious incidences.

In connection with this, numerous studies (e.g., Berlinski et al., 2009; Bennett, 2011; Brock, 2012; Croft, 2017; Heckman, 2011; Vandebroek, Roets, & Roose, 2012) argue that the period of early childhood is inherently critical and it has a persistent impact in the life spans of the child in school performance, school retention, adult earning, even less likely to engage in criminal behavior, and delinquency. In consequence, taking into account their developmental maturity and extending the services they deserve could make them to walk on the right track. It is this time that the ECCE could offer the substantial benefits to the overall development of the child below eight.

#### ***4.2.5 Challenges of Leadership in Early Childhood Education***

As can be realized in the results section above, there are many teething challenges worth addressing concerning the leadership of ECCE in the Ethiopian context. The difficulties of ECCE center children who live in two-thirds of the world including Ethiopia would likely stem from a paucity of resources ( & , 2015). Noticeably, in resource scares nations like Ethiopia it is not easy, if not impossible, to provide good services and promote ECCE children's best interests. Looking at the reality on the ground and very specifically, participants of the current study revealed that among the multifarious problems encountered issues surrounding pedagogy, administration, structure, and perception are found to be the dominant challenges of the ECCE leadership.

**4.2.5.1 Pedagogical Challenges.** As indicated earlier enormous pedagogical hiccups underwent in the leadership of ECCE. Among the most important of these may be notably suffering from: a) lack of professionalism; b) the presence of child-unfriendly learning environment; c) the absence of active learning pedagogy; d) the inadequacy and in most cases the non-existence of indoor and outdoor play materials; e) the patchwork nature of the ECCE curriculum f) the inadequate supply of suitable textbooks; g) the practices of developmentally inappropriate assessment mode to mention few. Out of quite a lot of all these and other pedagogical

challenges, the employment of foreign curriculum; the inadequate supply of suitable ECCE books; and lack of child-friendly assessment mechanisms have been discussed hereunder.

First, the findings of this study indicated two dissenting views over the employment of foreign curriculum. The first is the benefits of using an indigenized curriculum; whereas, the second view favors the use of the infused or the industrialized world's curriculum. The first group contends that the content of the ECCE curriculum is supposed to be home-made and developmentally appropriate. Yet, due to the lack of sufficient attention given to the subsector, the preschool curriculum lacks uniformity and relevance. In many cases, it is a patchwork, merely aggregate topics from Western textbooks or so. Besides, the use of the English language as a medium of instruction is found to be persistent among the private and urban-based preschools. That is to say, these schools crossed-over the aims of the ECCE policy of Ethiopia. In connection with this, one of the interviewees revealed, "the ECCE curriculum content has not sufficiently included the Ethiopian culture and traditions. Majority of the contents are adopted from abroad. It is against the culture and tradition of Ethiopian children."

Second, many participants believe that the use of the English language as a medium of instruction help children to acquire greater competence and achieve better results. For instance, parents associate the ability to speak, read, write, and listen in the English language with the quality of teaching and learning. For parents, the English language proficiency of their kids is considered as the barometer of their success. In line with this, one of the interviewed principal's intentions is also far removed from the implementation of the local curriculum particularly on the use of local languages. His emphatic argument favors the use of the English language over the local ones as a medium of instruction. He believes that to offset challenges related to quality education offering courses in the English language from the outset of preschools could do justice. He added, "if quality education is the requirement of the 21st century, mastery of the English language is a must.

If children are not better exposed to English language skills how come they grasp information and make use of it?” Briefly speaking, he claims, to produce competent citizens offering the English language as a single common course would not serve the purpose.

In contrast, following the observed popular belief about the benefits of building proficiency in the English language, there is a tendency to disregard the use of their home languages. In connection with this, a couple of studies conducted in Ethiopia (e.g., Fantahun, 2016; Tefera & Hagos, 2016; Teferra et al., 2009) conferred that the use of foreign language should not be considered as the sole parameter of quality schooling at ECCE centers. In accordance with the language policy of the country, one could also argue that the thought processes of the child seem better developed via the use of his/her mother’s tongue language rather than the use of exogenous languages such as English.

In connection with this, Tefera and Hagos’s (2016) study may make the argument clearer. Among other things, Tefera and Hagos underscored that “an inalienable quality of a good ECCE center is the extent to which it is contextually, culturally, socially, and linguistically relevant to the setting it is operating” (p. 107). More specifically, Serpell and Nsamenang (2014) noted that “it is arguably dysfunctional to promote the use of the language of power (English, French, and Portuguese) as a medium of instruction in ECCE settings” (p.24). Serpell and Nsamenang (2014) have also added that “academic competence is generally more readily acquired by children who have first mastered basic literacy in the language of their home” (p.24). This means that giving low attention to a child's mother tongue language results in learning difficulties (Sisay, 2016; Woldu, 2009).

To summarize, the desperate need of parents to see their kids speak English are the commonly exhibited setbacks. I strongly believe that instead of pushing children to grasp the foreign language (English) it could have been awesome if children prioritize their local languages

so that reared in their own culture. If children are grown up with their traditions, I hope they would become more disciplined and regard their national identity. A statement stipulated in section 3.5.1 of the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (1994) has also made clear that "cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages" (p.23).

Studies conducted on ECCE in African countries (e.g., Awopegba, Oduolowu, & Nsamenang, 2013; Woldu, 2009) associated learners low learning outcomes with the underutilization of native language as a medium of instruction. Likewise, they related effective learning with the proper use of mother tongue rather than the use of colonial masters' languages such as English. Awopegba, Oduolowu, and Nsamenang further elaborated that the use of indigenous languages will not hinder a child to be proficient in foreign languages and meaningfully participate in the international spheres at higher levels of education and career life as a global citizen. Quoting UNESCO (2008, pp.5-6), they have added that "countries likely to achieve EFA are those where the language of instruction is the learners' mother tongue" (p.55).

As cogently noted by participants of the present study, suitable ECCE textbooks and other reference materials are in short supply. The required books needed to deliver the program lack uniformity and unevenly distributed and children rarely received textbooks prepared as per the standard. Furthermore, not all teachers have the appropriate guidebooks as envisioned in the program design. The problem is even worse at the public ECCE centers.

There is also serious shortage of culturally relevant storybooks, given the plethora of child stories in society. Besides, the findings highlighted that the developmental friendliness of the available child books seem dubious. Particularly, in urban-based private ECCEs the complexity, size, and difficulty level of the available books seem beyond the developmental needs of children.

In the private preschools, it is common to see copies of irrelevant books from elsewhere (mainly India). In brief, the shortage of locally developed books, lack of uniformity and relevance among ECCEs in terms of the use of child books, and the use of foreign-affiliated books are often observed.

Further, the preparation, distribution, and the use of ECCE books seem received governments little attention. The reliance on the imported curricula belittled the opportunity to know and develop own culture and values from the onset. Therefore, if the government believed that children are the key resources of the nation due emphasis needs to be given for curriculum development and implementation. This idea is substantiated by Addisu and Wudu's (2019) study.

The thirdly explained pedagogical challenge is the child-unfriendly assessment mechanism. The un-developmental and age-inappropriate assessment mechanism has been carried out in almost all ECCE centers. ECCE centers have not yet implemented the child-friendly formative assessment. The assessment procedures and tools needed for the activity seems not equally developed and implemented in the observed ECCE centers. The exam is commonly administered to all ECCE children without exception like primary school and above levels of education. The implication is that the paper and pencil oriented tests and examinations, which signifies the teacher-centered teaching method, dominates the ECCE centers' mode of assessment. In connection to this, a study conducted by Fantahun (2016) on the practices of ECCE in Ethiopia corroborated the over the use of summative assessment rather than the more useful child-friendly assessment mechanism. What is more, the exam administration syndrome, which is commonly believed to be the sign of good teaching, tends to perpetuate at the expense of the developmentally appropriate assessment mechanism.

Formal tests do not fit the nature of young children. In addition, more reliance on the test, daily attendance, and class participation provide partial information about children's performance.

For, it never takes into account the activities of young children, which are equally important in the outdoor environment. As a result, it lacks validity and reliability to identify the interests, needs, and problems of children so that appropriate indoors and outdoors activities for individuals and groups of children should be planned and provided. In short, appropriate assessment techniques that provide a complete picture of children both in the classroom and in outdoor environments were not applied in most of the studied ECCE units.

**4.2.5.2 Administrative Challenges.** Despite remarkable strides made in access to Ethiopian ECCE education (Orkin et al., 2012) participants of the present study unanimously reported numerous administrative challenges. An empirical data gathered from interviews and document review illuminated the next administrative challenges. These include lack of budget; the problem of physical resources; inadequacy of material resources; the existence of unreliable quality assurance and licensing mechanisms; and lack of monitoring and evaluation to mention a few. The perceptible administrative challenges are boiled down into ECCE leaders' incompetency. Said differently, lack of solemn commitment of human resources surrounding the ECCE program (lack of responsible body) takes the lion's share of the predicament.

More specifically, among other things the more important of this quandary may be noted as lack of qualified preschool teachers and principals, and other support staff including ECCE experts; the poor salary scale of preschool workers; the non-existence of ECCE policy documents (particularly at the grassroots level and if it exists, the materials are poorly grasped); lack of awareness about the worth of ECCE; the absence of standard curriculum; the narrow school compound; the large class size; the problem of the adequate playground; poor latrine; absence of dining room.

There are manifold challenges. Inadequate ECCE budget; insufficient classrooms; shortage of principal teachers and assistant teachers; lack of play materials; poor teacher's salary; high

teacher's turnover; absence of scholarship program for ECCE teachers. There is also a desperate scarcity of indoor and outdoor play materials. Compared to the urban-based preschools the problem is more persistent in government-owned preschool centers. There is a lack of spaces for learning and play. The classrooms are overcrowded; many of the rented preschools lack spaces for indoor and outdoor activities. In the same manner, there is a problem with appropriate and well-ordered playground materials; toilets are not child-sized. Surprisingly, there is no difference between the elementary school and the preschool children's chairs and desks. From the point of policy material, in some private preschools, I could see the misuse of the national child curriculum or the use of an Indian origin curriculum.

Parallel to this, the introduction of unexpected school charges (often without sufficient economic reasons) in place is the visible voices of preschool parent participants of urban-based private preschools. Case in point: Admasu, one of the parents at Selam preschool, discontentedly expressed: "Every academic year the school (Selam) unreasonably added tuition and admission fees. Plus, there are unfair price tags on the school made textbooks, uniform, graduation bulletins, and so on".

**4.2.5.3 Structural Challenges.** Structural constraints are found to be the thirdly appeared challenges in the ECCE administrative machinery as perceived by participants of the current study. In harmony with them and data from the reviewed ECCE policy documents (e.g., The National ECCE Policy Framework of 2010), the structure of the ECCE subsector in terms of its leadership structure is neither vividly depicted nor practically observed in the country's education system. Said it differently, none of the policy documents stipulated who should lead preprimary education or the ECCE unit, with what qualification and experience, how long, in what ways, for what purpose, and so forth.

What has been observed is, a sort of leadership confined to the rule of thumb approach. In specific terms, participants of the current study agreed that the encountered structural challenge seems prone to the public ECCE centers compared to the private preschools. The 1994 Ethiopian education and training policy under the heading ‘Educational Structure’ stipulates, “Kindergarten will focus on the all-round development of the child in preparation for formal schooling” (p.14). As it stands here the postulated statement appears broad because it emphasized the overall purpose of the sector rather than how the structure operates.

As one of the apparatuses of the education system, the ECCE structure should likely have a noticeable and sound governance structure. I believe that the existence of a proper administrative structure of the ECCE sector creates a smooth, efficient, and meaningful functioning of the unit. Even though the presently observed link is found to be weak, the ECCE leaders, teachers, parents, and children are somehow operationally integrated into the ECCE centers’ education and caregiving process.

In order to overcome the alluded problem, the interactions of school leaders, followers, and aspects of the situation together with full cooperation work well. The previous “one man’s show” leadership that makes followers invisible and ignores the context has no room in the current age of interdependence (Halttunen, 2013, p.108). Leadership becomes a social construction, where individuals interact to form an emergent property of people in the organization. In this sense, in its sacred form, the ECCE leadership is a non-existent phenomenon. Likewise, the Bronfenner’s ecological systems theory (Awopegba et al., 2013) focuses on the uniqueness of the ECCE environment compared to other education sectors. The perspective provides a prolific framework for addressing leadership in ECCE and suggests an interdependent, interactive, and sound administrative structure. From this line of thinking, the availability of vigorous administrative

ECCE structure seems beyond question. The likely organized administrative structure in turn requires the presence of an independent ECCE leadership that creates an autonomous ECCE unit.

**4.2.5.3.1 An Independent ECCE Leader.** As claimed by participants of the study, the ECCE center which is attached to the primary school manifested a structural problem. This suggests the need to have an independent ECCE leader. If the ECCE center is recognized as an independent institution with a vision to realize and a mission to accomplish the existence of a separate leader should not be optional. However, what has been observed on the ground particularly in the government-led ECCE centers is different. The parent primary school principals lead the appended ECCE centers by default. Data obtained from interviews and observation revealed that much emphasis was given to the primary schools by these principals. Contrastingly, minimal or no attention was given to the ECCE center. Meaning, it is not the pseudo presence of the leader per se that matters, but the extent to which that leader has been wholeheartedly engaged in the practices of the institution that counts. Looking into the job of the ECCE center requires an independent ECCE leader. To surmise, if there is a need to have a robust organization with a definite purpose to achieve, the assignment of a separate ECCE leader who could comply with the philosophy of the institution would have not been left to chance.

Overall, all the interviewed public-owned ECCE center principals and teachers were on the same wavelength in describing the need to have a separate ECCE leader. Participants argued that if a job is to be carried out up to the standard, the availability of an independent and responsible leader is not only invaluable but also demanding. With the existing attachment, the ECCE center has got inconsiderable attention from the primary school leaders, who are believed to run the ECCE centers. On a positive note, the presence of an independent ECCE leader can improve quite a number of obscurities. One of the participants quoted that, “if we had an independent

ECCE leader, I am optimistic things could not be mismanaged, instead the current situation of the center would have another picture.”

**4.2.5.3.2 Weak and Intermittent Relationship.** A close examination of the garnered data predominantly revealed the manifestation of a weak and sporadic relationship between the urban-based preschools and the woreda and or the CRC level education officers. Contrastingly, participants reported the availability of relatively better communication between the governments led ECCE centers and the woreda education officials. With respect to this from a segment of the discussion held with Emebet, one of the ECCE experts has already been admitted to the loosely connected work relationship between the education offices and the ECCE centers. She mentioned that “there is almost no relationship between our offices and the preprimary education sector; if any, our contact is delimited to collect the annual statistical reports and often informal. At worst, poor technical assistants were provided for these institutions.”

Moreover, looking at the participants’ overall observation the probable cause for the weak, sporadic, informal relationships between the private preschools or the public ECCE centers and woreda/ district level education office is likely associated with the non-existence of an independent ECCE leader, especially at the public ECCE centers. It can be concluded that, although the ECCE center is opting for an established administrative structure none of the policy materials documented a piece of compelling evidence on how the institution is structurally led and coordinated. Thus, in order to ensure sound management, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of the ECCE undertakings operators must put a viable structure that could help solidify its organizational autonomy.

**4.2.5.4 Attitudinal Challenges.** Of all the observed ECCE leadership defies perceptual challenges may be considered the thorny issue. Using data obtained from participants of the study three sub-themes have emerged. The sub-themes that have given rise to the proliferation of

perceptual challenges include a) failure to trust the home-made ECCE curriculum, b) the inadequate government attention conferred to the program, and c) the insufficient parental engagement towards the ECCE program. The details are given below.

**4.2.5.4.1 Failure to Trust the Home-Made ECCE Curriculum.** A close examination of interview data confirmed the existence of loss of trust in the homegrown ECCE curriculum. Nevertheless, this finding is not consistent with research findings (e.g., Awopegba et al., 2013) that provoke children to learn best in their mother tongue and with home-made education curricula. Why some preschools failed to trust the home-made curricula and developed an outward look to plant the foreign curriculum in the home soil? Could be one of the questions one may ask him/herself and others being an education expert from the recipient end. In response to the concern, one of the ECCE experts revealed that “let alone the ECCE curriculum our entire education systems curriculum is not far removed from foreign influences.” our curriculum developers have been doing a copy-paste job. You cannot find a visible difference between the foreign-made textbooks and the textbooks developed by the local experts. When I see the contents of the textbooks and almost all the reference materials are imported from abroad. To be frank, all the books and subjects throughout our history are imported from abroad, which one is ours? I think that could be the main reason when some schools openly implement the foreign extracted curriculum and language the education experts kept silent instead of correcting it.

In the process of curriculum development, I think the commonly propagated concern ‘contextualization or localization’ is utilized mainly for political reasons. In practice what you can find is a different-the decontextualized hodge-podge. Some tend to argue that we are not self-sufficient to afford education by ourselves rather we remain foreign dependent in different ways. Unfortunately, there is no binding condition set in the ECCE policy document of the nation neither to trust nor to authorize the ECCE curriculum of foreign origin.

Despite the widely held belief over the benefits of mastering the second language and the employment of foreign curriculum, the use of the first language and an indigenous curriculum lays a solid foundation for all skills needed and intellectual development. For the success of a given child what matters is not only the acquisition of the English language but also the equally important development of his/her indigenous knowledge and culture. In connection with this, Awopegba et al. (2013) noted that children learn better when education is associated with their culture and taught in their native language.

However, an avalanche of urban-based parents with a better economic background including the elites would prefer to send their children to schools where the medium of instruction is English. I argue that perhaps due to the 'English language syndrome' parents and some private owned preschools consider the use of the English language over the local language as a barometer and symbol of quality education. Indeed, the use of the English language could be one of the factors that could contribute to the effectiveness of their child's learning but should not be the sole parameter. In short, evidence abounds that the natural mental processing course of a child appears at its best position when children are educated with mother tongue and homegrown curriculum during their formative years.

**4.2.5.4.2 Flimsy Government Attention.** Irrespective of the important document, the National ECCE Policy Framework of Ethiopia, which envisaged government intentions and in tune with international commitments to realize its goals and missions the currently experienced service delivery lacks due concern. The findings of the present study revealed the absence of a substantial amount of government attention. ECCE is found to be one of the extremely underemphasized sectors of government. Despite the endorsement of the policy document by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and the then Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, active engagement on the promises made for ECCE, as a case in point, in Dakar Goal 1 on

expanding and improving comprehensive ECCE; particularly for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children appear dubious (Woldehanna & Gebremedhin, 2012).

The findings of the present study also indicated that varied curriculum materials have been implemented across ECCE units. For instance, most private preschools employ a foreign oriented curriculum whereas the government-owned ECCE centers use a more or less similar curriculum. Similarly, as discussed earlier, lack of qualified ECCE workforce, absence or inadequacy of age-inappropriate books, lack of indoor and outdoor play materials, poor monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, large class size, inadequate provision of developmentally appropriate facilities, learning materials, and play-grounds, the poor accessibility of the ECCE curriculum and related documents, lack of monitoring, and supervisory support endangered the current situation of the ECCE sector. Besides, both the curriculum and the pedagogy that is being implemented could be considered as developmentally inappropriate. Overall, the absence of proper and adequate government involvement could characterize the prevailing situation of the ECCE sector among other things.

Overall, when we look back on the development of ECCE in Ethiopia, a slow and sporadic change has been observed (Lemma, 2014b). The ECCE policy that appeared to change the shape and status of ECCE seem almost beyond recognition. However, the education system in general and the ECCE in particular for being Western and unable to respond to the Ethiopians context and interest seem to perpetuate. Briefly, although the issue of ECCE has not been given the concern and attention it ought to have by responsible authorities, the present study is among efforts to uncover the previously mentioned gaps. This is because the ECCE program enabled children to be the “captains of their destiny rather than prisoners of their fate” (Yukl, 2014, p.45).

Given the benefits of ECCE in Africa, including Ethiopia ECCE remains in an embryonic state and unequally treated (Teferra et al., 2001). Also, Woldehanna (2016) added that many

developing countries underemphasized the investment of ECCE. In the same way, a shred of empirical evidence by (Berlinski et al., 2009) showed that though, ECCE is targeted to improve the life condition of the disadvantaged children, little is known about the benefits that it accrues to the population as a whole. Therefore, it could be fair to argue that if ECCE is properly led and children remain in the center of the interplay most likely an honest, fair, dependable, and rational generation is likely built.

Compared to other subsectors such as the primary school where the mass of ECCE units are found as an attachment; the ECCE units have been suffering in many ways. On the contrary, the latest report released in 2019 by the Ministry of Education revealed that “in order to achieve the ECCE objectives, the government of Ethiopia developed a curriculum, trained teachers, and provided supervisory support (Ministry of Education, 2019, p.8). Studies (e.g., Woldehanna, 2016; Woldehanna & Gebremedhin, 2012) conducted on ECCE also argued that except in some technical support, the government of Ethiopia has limited public investment in preschool education. As a result, the inequality that exists between urban and rural areas (and between rich and poor) may be exacerbated. In connection with this, Negash’s (1996) argument that says, thorough out history, Ethiopia’s education including early childhood education has been an urban phenomenon makes sense. In sum, it could be argued that for much of the 20th century, in Ethiopia, “access to education was scant, and if it existed, it was skewed and unequal in favor of urban and affluent families” (Woldehanna & Araya, 2016, p.7).

As a whole, from the previously mentioned insights, one can summarize that children who participate in high-quality ECCEs are more likely to enjoy successful life than their peers who are limited from. They are also better able to balance their wants and needs against those of others and make positive contributions to society. The likely opportunity to graduate from high school and tertiary education institutions appear higher. Contrary to that, if children do not learn proper values

and behavior when they are very young, problems can grow. These problems can flourish with serious consequences, as children grow older. For example, most likely, they drop out of school, use drugs, engage in criminal activity, or pursue other risky behaviors like teenage pregnancy, smoking, and the list goes on. In short, children who grow up with robust, positive values are happier and do better in and out of schools. In brief, it is worth noting that for the care and education of this group of people their caregivers such as the family, teachers, and the ECCE center leadership appear to play an indispensable role. Parallel to this study, Tigistu (2013), Woldehanna (2011), and Teferra et al. (2009) have also disclosed that in Ethiopia ECCE has been the unnoticed sector of education and consequently needs urgent attention.

**4.2.5.4.3 *Insufficient Parental Involvement in the ECCE Program.*** Inadequate parental engagement appears to be one of the major challenges of ECCE in the Ethiopian landscape. Findings of the present study revealed that lack of awareness, shortage of parents' time to support their children as well as providing full responsibility for their child's education to kindergarten teachers or schools seem to be among the commonly observed challenges. In agreement with a couple of related qualitative studies (Haile & Mohammed, 2017; Zewdie & Tefera, 2015), the present study showed that the discernable parents' contributions in the development of their children seem unduly reduced to the provision of educational materials and the payment of tuition fees.

However, the 2010 ECCE guideline stipulated the important role parents could play in a child's life. Results of the present study revealed that nearly all parents were of the opinion that when they send their kids to preschools the physical, social, intellectual, and emotional well-being of the child resides at the mercy of the preschool staff. This suggests that the majority of the parents have poor awareness about the purpose of ECCE education and the roles to be played by themselves and the preschools. For example, parents believe that if children spent most of their

time playing; they tend to judge as if they are not learning. Besides that, parents look for the quick development of literacy and numeracy skills.

Surprisingly, in order to coincide with parents' unrealistic needs, some private preschools seem to work against the goals of ECCE. For instance, the employment of Western language and curriculum are associated with parents' choice, actually, at the expense of own culture and traditions. Despite these expectations, if parents failed to closely work with preschools a gulf between their expectation and reality seems to prolong. Hence, in order to improve the deeply ingrained parental attitude towards the ECCE program, the considerable effort seems needed to avert the existing situation. In doing so, parents could play a key role in the development of the program. In brief, among other things, fostering a parent-teacher link likely creates a sound childcare spirit and environment.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The first section of the chapter presents the key findings of the study. The second section deals with the conclusions of the study. Recommendations on how to improve the current practices of ECCE leadership in the Ethiopian context and suggestions for further research are given in the third section.

#### 5.1 Summary of Major Findings

As indicated earlier, the study sought to examine the leadership of ECCE in the Ethiopian landscape. To realize this purpose, the study was guided by a constructivist paradigm. In order to understand the phenomenon of leadership in ECCE centers in its real world, the study is conducted using a multisite qualitative case study as suggested by Yin (2003). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979) and the contextual theory of leadership (Nivala, 1999, 2001) have also framed this study. Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding, Piaget's constructivist theory of cognitive development, and Burner's notion of child development also informed the study.

In order to collect the required data for the study, I have used three different techniques of data collection: semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. Data collection for this study took place in six ECCE sites found in Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa city administration. Study participants were purposefully recruited from the immediate settings where the ECCE leaders work and from people surrounding the ECCE leaders including the ECCE leaders themselves. A total of 21 study participants (six ECCE leaders, six ECCE teachers, six parents, and three ECCE experts) were interviewed. The findings of the study are summarized in five key themes related to the specific objectives of the study: ECCE leaders' assignment, the

leadership behavior of ECCE leaders, organizational citizenship behavior in ECCE, the employment of pedagogical leadership in ECCE centers, and challenges of leadership in ECCE.

To begin with, the study revealed that two models of ECCE leaders' assignment. First, it was found that the ECCE center is led by default or by the rule of the thumb. The leadership positions of the government ECCE centers, where the "O"-class centers are annexed to the primary schools fall under the supervision of the primary school principals. The primary school principals are found to be the default leaders of the ECCE centers. The practice does not, however, align with the 1994 Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia pertaining to the scheme of article 3.8, i.e. the educational organization and management. A close look at the prevailing trend towards the assignment of these default leaders revealed two competing views: the first one is found to be merit-based and the second view holds the opposite.

The results also indicated that the ECCE center's leadership assignment has been undertaken against the philosophy of professionalism—a finding consistent with what Tekleselassie calls, "the deprofessionalization of school principalship" (p.57, 2002). It was learned that private prechools principalship positions have been assumed via owners' goodwill and competition. None of the principals were qualified and actually no ECCE principals training scheme is in place. Not surprisingly, people assigned as ECCE principals were found to lack competency, knowledge, and skills of ECCE leadership.

On a positive note, despite lacking the required training, female ECCE principals were found to deliver better than their male counterparts did. They were better communicators, more respectful, and with less bureaucratic hassles, compared to their male counterparts. Reflective of the dispositions reported in related studies (e.g., Argyropoulou, 2013; Dunlop, 2008; Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013; Moss, 2006; Ozga & Walker, 1995; Seong Ng et al., 2013; Wise & Wright, 2012), female principals were also found to be soft-hearted, determined, collaborative, and tolerant. In a

word, it exhibited good emotional and social skills. In that sense, it could be said principals had what Seong Ng et al. (2013) call the attributes of female ECCE leaders affection, passion, kind-heartedness, and a healthy dose of optimism—qualities needed for child care.

Regarding the ECCE leaders' leadership behavior, it was found that the most commonly exhibited leadership behavior resides in many factors. For instance, the leader's competency, teacher's maturity level, gender, nature of the job, and context of the work environment among others could influence leadership behavior. Related to this, what Hersey and Blanchard (1982) conceptualized as telling was identified as the most commonly exhibited leadership behavior by ECCE center leaders in private s. That was followed by participatory leadership. Hands-off leadership has emerged as a key component of the "O"-class centers. At the same time, in the private ECCE center led by a female principal, the leadership style was found to be participatory.

As a whole, irrespective of the type of the ECCE center, leaders were also found to exhibit selling (coaching), delegating (empowering), and caring leadership in varying degrees. In harmony with the literature (see Aubrey et al., 2013; Louis et al., 2016) stories told by interview participants, corroborate this finding. Furthermore, a strong link between caring leadership and female leaders appears to uphold. Predominantly, it is possible to surmise that caring leadership is a widely undertaken approach in the ECCE centers in Ethiopia. This finding is in agreement with Gabriel's (2015), Gashaw's (2014), and Kroth and Keeler's (2009) study.

Regarding organizational citizenship behavior in ECCE, the discretionary extra-role behaviors expected to be fostered by the ECCE center leaders and their fellow teachers were found to be uneven in terms of context and gender. Variations on the applicability of OCB were observed between private and public ECCE center leaders. Private center leaders appeared to display more organizational citizenship behavior than that of the public centers. However, ECCE center teachers were found to demonstrate OCB irrespective of the type of the ECCE center. In terms of gender,

female teachers were found to display more OCB, compared to their male counterparts. This indicates that female ECCE teachers are found to be helpful and willing to fulfill the overarching goal and values of the center by moving the extra mile.

The present study also unveiled the lacuna of ECCE leaders in the effective delivery of organizational citizenship behavior. Specifically, public teacher participants of the current study unanimously confirmed that ECCE leaders lack determination, necessary attention, concern, and revealed recklessness in their leadership of the ECCE centers. Yet, ECCE leaders claimed to have been creating a fertile ground for OCB to happen. Put differently, let alone via the ill use of OCB, an institution where a leader or a teacher deemed to perform duties up to the prescribed duties doomed to fail. This suggests that, for an institution such as ECCE, the feasibility of OCB could warrant a dramatic change to happen.

Looking at the use of pedagogical leadership in ECCE centers, the study revealed that the key dimensions of pedagogical leadership were not in tune with the expected standards described in theory (e.g., Almeen et al., 2015; Fallace, 2015; Heikka, 2014; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Lahtero & Kuusilehto-Awale, 2015; Lee, 2016) and ECCE policy documents such as the 2010 ECCE policy framework. The data indicated that traditional pedagogical practices were found to be quite dominant in the centers. Active learning pedagogy, playful learning environment, and professionalism among staff were lacking in the centers. What is more, there was a merger of “O”-class children of different ages in the centers.

In spite of some positive attempts to do otherwise, this obsession with implementing the academic-oriented approach rather than play-based pedagogy is observable both in urban and rural ECCE centers. As a result, one could say the practice in all ECCE centers were contrary to Dewey’s suggestion (cited in Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 2013) that education of the child becomes most effective when it considers the intellectual, the physical, social, and emotional needs of the

child. In that sense, it can be said that, in Ethiopia, for several years play-oriented pedagogy has remained to be a buzzword implying the perpetuation of Tigistu's (2013) assertion. Though quite a number of ECCE teachers seem to be trained to nurture children through a play-focused approach, in practice, the situation appears different.

Parallel to this, the empirical materials revealed that a playful learning environment is almost non-existent; play is poorly perceived via the lens of the school community. Evidently, the play was not considered as a key tool to develop the cognitive and non-cognitive competencies of a child. This misconception about the importance of play appears to be the reason for not carrying it out in the ECCE centers. Consequently, play-based pedagogy seems to be squeezed out. In fact, the study sites are characterized by the absence of indoor and outdoor play materials. In other words, the scenario is contrary to Bartanen and Littlefield's argument that "playful activities offer a mix of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual rewards at all stages of life" (2015, p. 160).

To get back to the point, in addition to the misconception, our failure to use play, in my view, has something to do with our poor economy. Preparing playing fields require a long investment. Moreover, as I have reported in the fourth chapter s are built/located in narrow places where there is no luxury of preparing playing fields (e.g., swings, soccer field). I would assume fulfilling indoor games, though not as expensive, might not be affordable either. The absence of play from the ECCE centers in developing nations particularly in Africa seems attributable to poverty (Pence et al., 2004). However, Okengo (2010) noted that in Sub-Saharan Africa a good number of private ECCE centers rely on teacher-centered methods due to parents' misconceptions about the value of play. This situation, which is devoid of play in the present study sites also contrasts the atmosphere in most modern Western countries in which play has been highly valued and promoted in ECCE (Huang, 2013; Miller & Almon, 2009). In conclusion, early childhood education is assumed to be playful but very often the play-based approach is not part of their

teaching (Ministry of Education, 2010). In this context, the psychosocial constituent, which is important for suitable cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions, is largely ignored particularly in the ECCE units. In order to fill this gap, promoting the ECCE units is necessary.

In the same way, findings of this study revealed that the ECCE program is overwhelmed by para-professionals or unprofessional, inexperienced ECCE practitioners who also run it. That is predominantly true for rural-based public ECCE centers. Nearly all participants expressed that ECCE practitioners lack professionalism. The data from my school observation has also shown the prevalence of “deprofessionalization” in the ECCE sector (Tekleselassie, 2002, p.57). The tradition of assigning any graduate to the education sector without specialization is becoming a norm—a trend most commonly observed in the private sector. In this context, the marginalized profession and the inadequately prepared ECCE teachers and principals could hardly produce competent citizens.

The merger of “O”-class children of different ages was also found to be one of the goiters on mumps in the operation of ECCE. It appeared as one of the inescapable, the loudest, and persistent voices of participants of the present study. That is to say, participants from the public ECCE centers consensually reported that children ranging from four to eight years old are merged to receive the same kind of education in a classroom. If children are to be merged the proper use of multigrade or multiage teaching approach shall be executed otherwise it is counter productive. The one-year school readiness program (the O-class) which is likely to offset the underserved and marginalized O-class kids’ problem is constrained by quite a lot of implementation hiccups here in the soil of Ethiopia (Tefera & Hagos, 2016). Correspondingly, as per my observation, children of four, five, and six years old are admitted in the same O-classes and spend more than one-year attending O-classes.

Irrespective of the national and regional ECCE policy intentions, the merger without the intention to realize the multigrade or multiage approach is becoming business as usual. For instance, one of the ECCE policy guidelines (the recently launched ECCE implementation guideline of the Oromia Education Bureau of 2018) stipulates that O-Class children whose ages are 6 years old be expected to spend only one year in the school readiness program. As per the guideline children of 4 years old should go to the more structured preschools and spend 3 years and are expected to pass through the following three tiers: KG1 (nursery), KG2 (lower KG), and KG3, upper KG (sometimes referred to as preparatory). However, what has been observed on the ground does not align with what is stipulated in the guideline.

To resume, as a result of the preceding reasons and due to their varied ages, a yawning gap could be surfaced among children in the process of their learning and development. The ages, which range from 4 to 8+ years are unbridgeable because it falls in the two different Piaget's operational stages of child development: the pre-operational (2-7 years) and the concrete operational (7-11 years) stages (Ahmad et al., 2016). Therefore, one must not combine children of different ages (4 to 8+ years) in a narrow and didactically structured classroom and offer courses in a row using the boring lecture method regardless of their developmental maturity. This could potentially lead not to receive the timely and adequate care and education they deserve.

As for the challenges of ECCE leadership issues related to pedagogy, administration, institutional structure, and attitudinal problem were found to be dominant. On the subject of pedagogy, the use of foreign curriculum, inadequate supply of suitable ECCE books, and lack of child-friendly assessment mechanisms was found to be the main challenges in the ECCE centers. Regarding administration, there were numerous challenges of which lack of awareness about the worth of ECCE, shortage of qualified workforce, budget shortfalls, the problem of physical resources, the inadequacy of material resources, poor salary scale, poor quality assurance, and

licensing mechanisms, poorly grasped ECCE policy documents (if at all they existed), narrow school compound, and overcrowded classrooms can be cited as the major ones.

The situation was found to be worse in government-owned preschools, this is in harmony with the findings of Yizengaw and Tessega (2020) conducted in the implementation of ECCE in Bahir Dar city administration. Parallel to that, structural constraints were found to be the more severe problem in public ECCE centers than they were in private preschools. A final word regarding the emerged attitudinal challenges entails lack of trust in the home-made ECCE curriculum, government's poor attention towards the ECCE program, and parents' limited involvement in the ECCE centers.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

Despite what is known about the ECCE programs, the concern of leadership behaviors, practices, and challenges in private preschools and government O-classes of Oromia regional state and Addis Ababa city administration has not yet received considerable policy, practice, and research attention. To that end, this study explored the leadership assignment, the leadership behavior, teachers OCB, the employment of pedagogical leadership, and challenges of the ECCE leadership at the unit level.

In spite of some success stories, the overall practices of ECCE leadership at the grassroots level were found to be enacted against the philosophy of professionalism. Although, professionalism appears the sine qua non of the sound institutions. Professionalization of the sector is incomplete and not fully endorsed by the significant stakeholders. Meaning, despite the need to give appropriate services, in the majority of Ethiopian ECCE centers, proper childcare, and education seem not sufficiently provided due to practitioners' incompetency implying the need for government interventions.

This signifies that the majority of the Ethiopian ECCE is led by default or the rule of the thumb. Mostly, one can conclude that practitioners that have no leadership training and under-prepared for the position very unlikely to build a robust leadership scheme in ECCE centers. Due to this, children, particularly the cornered ones, could be the losers. The idea is that if ECCE programs are well managed, the quality of education can be maintained. Overall, from the above-mentioned premises, one can understand that the deployment of ECCE leadership is not something left to chance if children are considered as the most valuable assets of the given country.

The leadership behavior is contingent upon the leader, gender, teachers' maturity, or readiness level, and context-specific. Evidently, the exhibited leadership behavior varied based on who led the center. Given the same type of ECCE centers, in the female-led ECCE centers, leadership behavior was found to be different from that of their male counterparts. Despite it lends itself for contradictory discourses, female principals were found to be more adaptive to a given situation in executing their duties.

Findings disclosed that OCB that are expected to be triggered by the ECCE center leaders and their fellow teachers did not seem to occur evenly. Variations were observed between private and public ECCE center leaders on the applicability of OCB. In light of gender differences, female teachers were found to display a behavior that is more consistent with the dimensions of the OCB construct such as altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, sportsmanship, and civic virtue.

In today's competitive and demanding educational life, the educational masterpiece appears the ECCE leader. Without a well-qualified and motivated leader, reform will succeed sporadically and the goal of proper child development is likely to be threatened. In the Ethiopian education landscape, ECCE leaders are assumed to be the major force in the center reform. Much of the current literature also suggests that leaders are perhaps the most significant key constituent in establishing effective centers. Apparently, ECCE leaders play a key role in making ECCE centers

as effective as possible. For ECCE centers to be successful and to get extraordinary things done leaders appear responsible for cultivating OCB.

In this sense, ECCE center leaders bridge the gap between center visions with an accurate picture of reality. A highly effective ECCE leader is not called to the job per se, but more importantly to the opportunity to make a difference. This could mean a change in the educational landscape, heal an ailing ECCE center, or work for the concepts of greater accountability, equity, and excellence. Outstanding ECCE leaders are the sense makers of their fellow compatriots and help create a sustainable ECCE center culture that will enhance students' and teachers' productivity. Despite the low key given to the notion in the Ethiopian context, the importance of leadership as a predictor of OCB has been well established in Western settings.

As noted earlier the dimensions of pedagogical leadership such as lack of child-oriented pedagogy, playful learning environment, professionalization, and merger of children of different ages were found to be not in tune with the 2010 ECCE Framework and the 1994 Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia. Child-centered pedagogy was not practiced in ECCE centers. ECCE centers were overwhelmed by the descriptors of teacher-centered methodology such as chalk and talk, drills, and rote learning approaches. I argue that the use of the inappropriate methodology for children below eight is largely a reflection of misconception, ill training, and irresponsibility. I believe that a lack of resources could impede the practice. That should not, however, be an excuse for not delivering active learning for the child. By and large, the lack of professionalism, absence of accountability, and ignorance appear to be factors responsible for the lack of active learning methodology.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning that, with the exception of some sporadic attempts made at private preschools, nearly in all O-class centers, the pedagogical practice was not considerate of the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional needs of the child. The playfulness

of the learning environment and perception of the school community towards play was found to be similar in urban and rural ECCE centers. The play-based pedagogy seemed to be squeezed out and the absence of indoor and outdoor play materials characterized the study sites. Additionally, coupled with the absence of play from the school life of ECCE children, the poor understanding of the benefits of play by all the stakeholders of ECCE has likely made learning a laborious business.

The holistic development of children in general and the effectiveness of the ECCE program in particular heavily rely on how the ECCE program is led. This situation was found to be worse in O-class centers. From the experiences acquired so far and as the findings of this study indicates, it may be concluded that there are four areas of concern with regard to the challenges of ECCE leadership. These are related to pedagogy, administration, institutional structure, and uncaring attitude. Further to these, as cited in Chapter 2, Dewey and Montessori's child development philosophy, which advocates children's care and education to be developmentally oriented seems ill-disposed. Therefore, perhaps, this dissertation has also contributed to the knowledge of leadership in ECCE in the private preschools and government O-classes. Finally, a claim is made by the researcher that what was found out in sample areas is more likely to occur in other rural and urban areas of the country.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

As can be realized in the foregoing sections, there are a number of problems worth addressing in relation to the leadership of ECCE in Ethiopia. Hence, based on the conclusions of this study I have the following suggestions for the government of Ethiopia and the private sector to forward:

First of all, the large majority of public ECCE centers are found under the mercy of primary school principals who accidentally assumed the ECCE leadership posts. These principals have been doing their job without any sort of ECCE principal-ship training and by considering the duty as

their second priority. Besides, their assignment procedures to the primary schools seem not totally merit-based, open, and transparent. The school leadership positions should thus be assumed solely based on merit via open, free, and fair competition or election procedures. Besides, since the ECCE unit has its own unique identity and features, vision to realize, and missions to accomplish the presence of an independent full-time leader should not be discretionary. Equally, a well-organized and autonomous ECCE unit must be instituted if children are really to fully enjoy their natural talents and grow following their natural order of care and education they deserve.

Second, as it stands, teachers in most government O-class centers appear to be less trained. Nor do appear to remunerated well. They should thus need to get adequate professional training and a conducive teaching atmosphere. In order to instill the spirit of early childhood education across the ECCE centers retraining opportunities should also be made available. Among other things, the need to raise the educational stakeholders' attitude pertaining to the long term and multifarious gains that comes from a well-established ECCE program should not be relegated. However, evidently the current ECCE institutions of the nation especially the public ones are unlikely to create the type of children the world deserves with underpaid, inexperienced, and demotivated paraprofessionals or unprofessional staff members. Therefore, professional development opportunities should be in place as well as the working condition of ECCE teachers should be improved by providing incentives and subscribing to better installments.

As can be understood from the conclusions made in this study, the public ECCE centers are may fail because the units are instituted on an unsound basis irrespective of the sound ECCE policy framework of the country. Undeniably, the attached ECCE units are the ill-treated branch of education in all respects such as budget allocation, staff deployment, educational materials distribution, training/retraining, and supervision among others. It does not seem to be considered as an integral part of the nation's formal education business. That is because ECCE has not yet

received the support and attention it deserves. Unless the prevalent glitches are resolved, any gain that is expected from ECCE centers annexed in primary schools would be hardly attained. To this end, all the concerned parties primarily the government should expend their concerted effort.

Equally, the finding of the current study might provide an opportunity to inform policymakers and education officials of different tiers by way of creating awareness regarding the benefits of running schools in general and ECCE centers in particular in light of the basic tenets of OCB. This is because among other things one of the fundamental reasons for schools to be effective depends on the willingness of the staff members to go beyond the call of the duty to attain their organization's overarching goals.

Parallel to that, the findings of the study also revealed that the key dimensions of pedagogical leadership are not in tune with the expected standards described in theory and ECCE policy documents. Henceforth, a fundamental shift is suggested. Some of these include the following: (1) deterring the traditional teaching approach and bolstering the active learning model, (2) changing the play deficient learning environment by playful learning environment, (3) educating/training the unprepared and inexperienced ECCE' professionals', (4) upholding home-made curriculum and valuing indigenous knowledge and languages of instruction, and (5) ameliorating the merger of children of different ages or the one-size-fits-all approach to the one-size-does not-fits- all approach.

To ameliorate the observed ECCE manpower development yawning gap launching a Bachelor's program in the Leadership of ECCE could also be one of the potential solutions that could offset challenges related to efficiency. Therefore, this study suggests the above-mentioned undergraduate degree program be completed in four years; out of which three years are dedicated to course works and the remaining one year needs to be devoted to the apparent ship program. Female candidates are preferably encouraged to join the program. In doing so, ECCE female

practitioners' who hold both pieces of knowledge of the discipline and leadership skills along with the ability to put these into practice would be produced. The following courses are also suggested: (a) Play, (b) Caring Leadership, (c) Parent and School Relationship, (d) School Organization and Management, (e) Educational Leadership, (f) School Supervision, (g) Curriculum Development and Implementation, (h) Theories of Learning, (i) Active Learning Methodology, (j) Fundamentals of ECCE, and (k) Philosophy of Education among others. Besides, to professionalize the ECCE staff strengthening the ECCE teachers' training colleges, ensuring the availability of a strong support system, and monitoring mechanisms pay off.

The findings of the present study also indicated the unduly reduced parental involvement in the ECCE program. Due to a lack of adequate awareness and know-how about the irreplaceable role to be played by parents in the process of their children's care and education. The discernable parental participation seems limited to the provision of educational materials and tuition fees. This finding is in harmony with Dighe and Seiden (2020). The poor understanding of parents tends to shift the lion's share of their key roles and responsibilities to be played by themselves about the care and education of their children towards the school teachers' needs to be profoundly improved. Besides, their unrealistic expectations about the use of Western curriculum, foreign language, assessment mechanisms, the value of play, and teaching methodology seem negatively affecting the operation of both the urban-based preschools and the rural ECCEs of these days. Therefore, a vigorous and concrete awareness creation program should be undertaken at the national level possibly via the use of all the available mass Media all over the country. At the school level, strong and sustainable links must exist between parents and ECCE units.

Furthermore, regardless of instilling Western culture and identity at the expense of own culture and traditions, findings of the present study disclosed that additional irresponsible actions have been undertaken by some urban-based private preschools. Every year the schools are

accustomed to unexpectedly introduce new school charges often without sufficient economic reasons. Similarly, there is an unfair price tag on school made textbooks, uniforms, graduation bulletins, and so forth. Therefore, to avert such mismanagements, an education law that governs this sort of irresponsibility should be developed and ratified by the governing body.

Most importantly, despite their foundational role, the governing body does not provide adequate emphasis to ECCEs as reflected in the number of assertions made in the present study. For instance, the inadequate resources of various forms and the marginalized importance of ECCE within the education sector have been observed. This calls for the government of Ethiopia to pay close attention and assist the practices of the ECCE sector. It seems this time that all matters, such as its leadership and the attitudes towards ECCE would be promoted. That is because for the child's better future promoting ECCE could have tremendous benefits. This means, the promotion of ECCE via the campaign seems timely. Besides, the provision of ECCE should draw the full attention of educational stakeholders' rather than overlooking it.

Above all, like primary and secondary schools, in which the operational costs are mainly covered by the government, preprimary schools have to be sufficiently funded. This is because an early investment made for the well-being of children could enable them to break the intergenerational poverty cycle and inequality that can be created due to fewer resources and less opportunity. For instance, the newly introduced General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) fund of the World Bank needs to reach the preprimary subsector as well. Therefore, to invest more in ECCE the government has to reconsider its education priorities.

As a final point, considering the little amount of research in this area, the study also called for additional investigations on the leadership of ECCE regarding leadership assignment, leadership behavior, OCB, pedagogical leadership, and challenges of ECCE leadership, using

qualitative approach because this study might give some clues for other researchers that could help them embark further.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### *Semi-structured interview guide questions*

##### **Section I: Personal data**

Directions: Please provide the following demographic information. I will use “√” mark where necessary.

1. Code: .....
2. Date: .....
3. Time: .....
4. Gender: Male ( ) Female ( )
5. Age: .....
6. Interview specific site: .....
7. ECCE Center's name:.....
8. Year of establishment:.....
9. Phone number:.....
10. Term of employment:.....
11. Salary:.....
12. Qualification/s: .....
- a) Field of specialization: .....
- b) Graduated from (name of institution): .....
- c) Graduation year: .....
13. Total years of experience in education:
14. How long have you been teaching in early childhood care and education?.....
15. Current administrative position: .....
16. Position before current position: .....
17. Number of years at current position: .....

##### **Section II: Interview questions**

*#1. How do early childhood care and education leaders engage in the practices of preschools and O-classes in the center?*

- a) How do leaders assume the leadership position in early childhood care and education centers in care in early childhood settings?
- b) Tell me about your leadership journey to the current position?
- c) Could you tell me the situation of your preschool when you took this position? What changes have you brought about in the process of improving the ECCE center?
- d) Have you ever received any leadership training or study pertaining to the leadership of ECCE?

*#2. What leadership behavior is commonly exhibited in preschools and O-classes?*

- a) What kind of ECCE leader would you like to see in the center? Please explain?
- b) Have you noticed (1) no change, (2) some change, or (3) considerable change in your leader's choice of leadership styles during the past three years?

- c) What strategies are used by the ECCE leader to convince or influence coworkers to get the job done?
- d) How do leaders let staff members know what is expected of them? Provide in detail, the work that should be done, and how should work be done?
- e) How does the ECCE leader make sure that the staff members' work to capacity?

*#3. To what extent do the ECCE leaders cultivate early childhood teacher's organizational citizenship behavior?*

- a) How does the ECCE leader go beyond the job requirements to help others with whom the individual comes into contact?
- b) How does ECCE leader's contribute to the leadership of ECCE in a responsible manner?
- c) What do you think about the ECCE leader's dedication to the job and desire to exceed formal requirements in aspects such as punctuality or conservation of resources?
- d) How does the ECCE leader prevent problems deriving from the work relationship?
- e) How do you describe the professional ability of the ECCE leader to endure the frustrations of a less than perfect situation without complaining?

*#4. How is pedagogical leadership employed in preschools and O-class centers?*

- a) Do you think that the ECCE policy serves the purpose of early childhood care and education? If yes, in what ways? If not, why not?
- b) Do you think that children of the center properly utilize the indoor and outdoor materials in the process of caring and educating? If yes, how; if not why not?
- c) Do you think that the ECCE curriculum fits with the tradition and culture of the children? How?
- d) To what extent play-oriented pedagogy has been practiced in the center?

*#5. What challenges affect the proper operation of ECCE leaders in the center?*

- a) What do you think is the overall challenges of the ECCE leadership for the proper operation of the center?
- b) Under what situations do the ECCE leaders operate?
- c) In specific terms what challenges affect the proper operation of ECCE leaders? Examples?
- d) How do you overcome these challenges?

I thank you so much for your time and cooperation!

## **Parents Interview Guide**

*#1. How do ECCE leaders engage in the practices of early childhood care and education in the center?*

- a) How do leaders assume the leadership position in early childhood care and education centers in care in early childhood settings?

*#2. What leadership behavior is commonly exhibited in early childhood care and education centers?*

- a) What kind of ECCE leader would you like to see in the center? Please explain?
- b) Have you noticed (1) no change, (2) some change, or (3) considerable change in your leader's choice of leadership styles during the past three years?
- c) How effective are leaders in achieving the overall purpose of the ECCE center? Can you tell me some examples?

*#3. To what extent do the ECCE leaders cultivate early childhood teachers' organizational citizenship behavior?*

- a) How does the ECCE leader go beyond the job requirements to help others with whom the individual comes into contact?
- b) How does ECCE leader's contribute to the leadership of ECCE in a responsible manner?
- c) What do you think about the ECCE leader's dedication to the job and desire to exceed formal requirements?
- d) How does the ECCE leader prevent problems deriving from the work relationship?
- e) How do you describe the professional ability of the ECCE leader to endure the frustrations of a less than perfect situation without complaining?

*#4. How is pedagogical leadership employed in preschools and O-class centers?*

- a) Do you think that children of the center properly utilize the indoor and outdoor materials in the process of caring and educating? If yes, how; if not why not?
- b) Do you think that the ECCE curriculum fits with the tradition and culture of the children? How?
- c) Do you think that the ECCE policy serves the purpose of early childhood care and education? If yes, in what ways? If not, why not?

*#5. What challenges affect the proper operation of ECCE leaders in the center?*

- a) What do you think is the overall challenges of the ECCE leadership for the proper operation of center?
- b) In specific terms, what challenges affect the proper operation of the ECCE leaders?
- c) Under what situations do the ECCE leaders operate? Examples?
- d) How do you overcome these challenges?

**Appendix B**  
**Observation Check List**

- ECCE Center's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Year of Establishment: \_\_\_\_\_
- ECCE Leader's name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Location	Region:	Zone:	Woreda:	Kebele:
Site	Urban	Rural		
Center type	Government "O"-class	Private KG		
Condition of the ECCE center	Attached to primary preschool	Independent		
Leader's assignment	To serve both the primary school and the ECCE center	Specific to the primary school	Specific to the ECCE center	Not clearly defined
Language of instruction	Amharic	Afan Oromo	English	Other
Courses offered	List of courses	Contact hours per week		
	1. Mother tongue			
	2. English			
	3. Math			
	4. General science			
	5. Esthetics (Art, Music,			
	6. Play			
	7. Other (if any)			
Duration of a period (in minutes):				
Duration of recess (in minutes):				
Number of ECCE teachers with qualifications	Qualifications	Male	Female	Total
	ECCE Certificate			
	TTI Certificate			
	ECCE Diploma			
	Diploma in teaching			
	B.A/B.Sc. in			
	MA/MSc in teaching			
	Other			
Total				

Teachers living conditions	Salary in ETB	House allowance	Transport	Other
Number of children in the center	Nursery	M=	F=	T=
	Lower KG	M=	F=	T=
	Upper KG	M=	F=	T=
	Total	M=	F=	T=
Preschool/center size in m <sup>2</sup>				
Fence	Available	Poorly available	Not available	
Classrooms	Meets the standard	Poorly available	Not available	
Child seats	Meets the standard	Poorly available	Not available	
Class size	Nursery=	Lower KG=	Upper KG=	
Child rest-room	Available	Poorly available	Not available	
Dining room	Available	Poorly available	Not available	
Toilet	Available	Poorly available	Not available	
Water service	Pipe	Spring	Pond	Not available
Health post (Emergency)	Available	Not available		
Engagement of the three ministries	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Health	Women, children, and youths affairs	
Indoor play materials	Available	Poorly available	Not available	
Outdoor play materials	Available	Poorly available	Not available	
Play ground	Available	Poorly available	Not available	
Child text books	Well equipped (1:1)	Not sufficient	Not at all	
Reference books	Sufficient	Not sufficient	Not available	
Reading corner	Available	Poorly available	Not available	
Parent-teacher communication book	Available with regular communication	Available with intermittent communication	Not available	
Supervisory support	Adequate	sporadic	Not at all	
Source of funding	Gov't	Private (fee)	Other	
Budget allocated for the program (if gov't owned)	Amount per child in ETB (if any):	Not allocated	Shares from primary school	
Amount of Tuition fee (if				
Children's uniform	Available	Not available	Mixed	
PTA's involvement	Adequate	sporadic	Not at all	
ECCE policy documents	Available	Not available		

ECCE minutes	Available	Not available		
ECCE roster per year	Available	Not available		
ECCE continuous assessment mark list	Available	Not available		
Trainings on ECCE	Offered	Not offered		
Child clubs	Organized and functional	Organized but not functional	Not available	