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The Practices and Challenges of Kindergarten Education in Addis Ababa City Administration: Ethiopia

Abstract: The intention of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of kindergarten education in Addis Ababa city administration. The core intentions of the study were to check the appropriateness of the instructional material, teacher quality and the physical environment of the schools. For this study, the researcher used a descriptive survey research method and both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were employed. The data gathered from 22 kindergartens, 116 teachers, 21 principals, 5 education quality, audit and inspection experts. The findings of the study revealed that in most kindergartens the key inputs, such as indoor and outdoor materials, were insufficient, there was a lack of qualified human resources and instructional materials, constituting a major bottleneck, awareness creation on the part of stakeholders was low and limited support from educational expertise to private schools were among the challenges. Therefore, Addis Ababa Education Bureau ought to be revising, preparing and distributing curriculum materials based on the interest and developmental level of the children. The city administration, in collaboration with different college and Universities, are supposed to provide training for kindergarten teachers and other personnel to enhance their capacity. In addition, the city administration may promote investors who participate in the sector to construct buildings which may function as kindergartens; "woreda (section of district)" education office in partnership with schools and other stakeholder ought to support small enterprises to produce indoor and outdoor materials. Moreover, joint training, workshops, seminars

and awareness amongst pertinent stakeholders should be promoted in a coordinated manner.

Keywords: kindergarten, early childhood, preschool

1. Background of the Study

Nowadays, the largest wave of early childhood educational activity is designed to facilitate appropriate child development and overcome their cognitive, social, emotional and physical potentials deficits (Gezahagne, 2005). Since children need certain skills and understanding to become intelligent citizens of their country, meeting the needs of the children with a school program will foster their best development (Morrison and Perry, 1961). Kindergarten strives to offer children a foundation for the development of social skills, self-confidence, motivation and cognition. They acquire a variety of important skills, knowledge and attitudes that will affect their ability to learn, personal development, relationships with others, and future participation in a great society (Curtis, 1998). Smith (2001) also indicated that early education is termed as the foundation stage of education, where children experience rapid physical, emotional, intellectual and social growth. There is an increasing recognition by professional educators and nonprofessional alike that kindergarten experience is an important part of a child's education. A number of states have added the kindergarten to their school system in recent years, other localities are taking steps to incorporate kindergartens as an accepted lower rung on the educational ladder.

Kindergarten education program will be emphasizing on creative play, social interaction and natural expression, also teaching social skills, and provide children with an academic foundation for next grade. In class, they are learn the alphabet, numbers and colors, they study their bodies, their families, and their communities, they listen to stories and read aloud, they make art projects, they participate in skits or short funny and dramatic productions and they learn about holidays, plants, animals and

other topics in science and social studies. It strives to offer children a foundation for the development of social skills, self-confidence, motivation and cognition (the process of knowing). A kindergarten teacher can help children to develop self-confidence in themselves and collaborating with others to solve problems by extending children's play. Play is the first and most important mode of instructional strategies in kindergarten by providing an environment in which children are free to play with each other and with a wide range of carefully selected material, teacher facilitate children's of development and learning (Gezahagne, 2005). There are other appropriate modes of instruction suitable for facilitating kindergarten children's development and learning, chiefly learning by doing, experiencing and observing (Wills and Stegeman, 1956).

From the human rights perspective, the UN convention on the rights of child (CRC), adopted by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) in December 1991, stipulated that the child's right to education shall be directed to "the development of the child's personality, talent and physical abilities to their fullest potential". The world conference on education for all (EFA) that took place in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990, articulated the significance of the early years as the foundation for the life of an individual. As indicated in the universal declaration of human rights, the international convention on economic social and cultural rights and the CRC, the obligation of the member state is not limited to making education available and accessible to every child but also includes ensuring content and quality (MoE, MoWA, MoH, 2010). Positive early experiences with school are of paramount importance to young children. What they learn in kindergarten provides the basis for the acquisition of literacy and mathematics in later grades.

The government of Ethiopia recognized the importance of early childhood care and education (ECCE) as a critical period that require due attention and a great deal of investments (MoE, 2003). With the intention of having intelligent and creative children, the government itself indirectly supports the initiatives for private kindergarten by preparing the curriculum as well as by training teacher's (MoE, 2002). Nevertheless, kindergarten education is still one of the most neglected areas in Ethiopia.

The enrollment rate in 2010/2011 is about 5.2% nationally which is a negligible figure. Out of the estimated 7.31, million children of the appropriate age group (age 4–6), only about 382,741 children have been reported to have access to pre-primary education in 3,418 kindergartens all over the country. Though the enrollment is small when compared to the appropriate age group, enrollment is higher than in the previous year by about 0.4 % (MoE, 2003 Educational Annual Abstract). In the last few years the private sector in urban centers has shown a growing interest in this opportunity but in Addis Ababa, however, it is only accessible for the very few children coming from well-to-do families. In order to provide access it is important to give due consideration to the expansion of kindergarten in general and to its curriculum, human, material resource supplies, and basic facilities in particular. The inspiration for this study partly arose from the recognition of the role kindergarten education plays in enhancing opportunities for further education in Ethiopia.

2. Statement of the Problem

It is clear that various research evidence has suggested the critical importance of the pre-school program for the future harmonious development of children. However, the pre-school education program in Ethiopia is to date too limited to meet the demands of the growing numbers of preschool age children and provides only for well-to-do families in the country (Teshome, 1979, Dereje, 1994) and they stated that the government is unable to assuage the demand of kindergarten age children even in the capital. The research findings also show that there is a problem of meeting the educational opportunity of preschool age children, not only in rural Ethiopia but also in the capital itself. Today, with the rise and growth in the kindergarten movement, research on kindergartens appears to be concerned with the skill, maturity factors in relation to school achievement, the physical aspect of the school plant, the development sequence in learning, factors influencing human relations, methods and training (Foster and Headley, 1959 p.29). Research played

an important role in supplying us with facts which have helped to find a definite place for the kindergarten in education system, helping to alert the public to the developmental need of young children, teachers to evaluate their own procedures and administrators and policy-directing groups plan for the welfare of kindergarten age children.

Kindergarten teachers face diverse problems in curriculum implementation such as, lack of physical facilities, difficulty in evaluation practice, lesson planning and organizing child activities, teaching-learning process, social environment problem, stating goal and objective, content, lack of administrative support and problems related to parental involvement (Kari A. Dietz, 2002). In Ethiopia, the major challenges confronting current pre-school education are high fees, lack of a standard curriculum, guidelines, culturally relevant story books, lack of access to early childhood education for almost all children and especially children from low socio-economic backgrounds, lack of awareness about the value and type of care and education and misconception about children's learning (MoE, 2003). Therefore, it is important to conduct this research for the following reasons: (1) to recognize the role of kindergarten education in the future primary education of children, (2) to identify the main challenges facing kindergarten education related to the quality of teachers, instructional material and physical environment of the schools, and (3) to recommend solutions to reduce problems. In addition, the works of the researchers from the Woreda Education Office in the area of education quality, audit and inspection have indicated that there are serious problems in the practice of kindergarten education. These include problems related to giving high attention to academic achievement with little emphasis to social development, ignoring the play way teaching method, low quality of teaching and insufficient competency to teach in kindergarten and lack of indoor and outdoor material. All of these factors compelled me to investigate the practices and challenges of kindergarten education. Indeed, while different educators and researchers have investigated the problem abroad, there has been limited local research conducted in the area of kindergarten education in Ethiopia. The central purpose of the study is to explore the practices and challenges of kindergarten education. On top of this, the study

was design to investigate problems faced by teachers with respect to their educational level, usage of indoor and outdoor material, availability of curriculum material and conduciveness of the physical environment. In so doing, the following basic research questions are posed in relation to the practices and challenges of kindergarten education.

- 1) To what extent are the indoor materials of the kindergarten appropriate to children's learning?
- 2) To what extent are the outdoor materials of the kindergarten appropriate to children's learning?
- 3) To what extent is the physical environment of the kindergarten conducive to children's development?
- 4) Is the kindergarten curriculum material relevant to the children's developmental needs?
- 5) To what extent are kindergartens made available with the required human resources?

3. Review of Related Literature

History: The German educator Friedrich Froebel started the first kindergarten in 1837 in Blankenburg, Prussia. Froebel chose the German term kindergarten (literally, children's garden), because he intended the children in his school to grow as freely as flowers in a garden. Froebel's idea was influenced mainly by the work of Johan Amos Comenius, who in the 17th century introduced the idea that school should teach infants. Another influence was the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, who wrote *Emile* (1762), a treatise on child's education in nature. In addition, the Swiss education reformer Johann H. Pestalozzi, who founded a school for infants in the late 18th and early 19th century also influenced Froebel (Curtis, 1998, Gezehagn, 2005). The fundamental ideas behind Froebel's concept of the kindergarten are giving happiness to children by providing them with the necessary environment for growth. He designed special play materials and introduced the idea of associating ac-

tions with singing songs (Seefeldt, 1989). Froebel not only influenced the European pre-school education system but he also brought the concept of the kindergarten to America when the German immigrant Margareta Meyer Schurz opened the first kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin – the first American kindergarten was established in 1856. The kindergarten is now an established part of American education, and many of Froebel's ideas of childhood experience and methods of play have been incorporated into current theories of early childhood education and progressive schooling. The same is true for the rest of the world – for instance, England launched childhood education in 1851 <<http://www.faqs.org/childhood/Me-Pa/Nursery-School.html/>>

Historical development of kindergarten education in Ethiopia: the development of education in Ethiopia is strongly influenced by traditional (religious) aspects. It began in the 4th century A. D. and in 1908 Menelik II opened the first modern school based on the western education systems. The traditional approach has characterized Ethiopian education throughout the history of this nation. The traditional education system is deeply rooted in the Ethiopian orthodox church and is recognized as one of the oldest education systems in the world. For centuries orthodox churches, monasteries and convents were the only centers for formal schooling, from preschool to the university level (Pankhurst cited in Hoot, Szente and Belete, 2004, Zeray, 2011). It was limited to males alone and dated to the medieval period when male children began attending church services at around age of 4. The curriculum for children of this age consisted primarily of the drilling and practice of the alphabet. Mastery of the alphabet was followed by reading and recitation of religious texts that began with the psalms of David (Belete, 2004 as cited in Zaray, 2011: 24). In Ethiopia, the concept of preschool education in the modern sense is a recent phenomenon dating to the 20th century when Emperor Menelik II recognized the importance of improved and modern education, establishing the first public school called Menelik II in 1908. Likewise, the first modern pre-school was established in Dire--Dawa, mainly for the children of French consultants who were helping to build the first railroad in the country (Amelework, 2007:11, Aregesh, 2005 cited

in Yalew, 2011:13). These authors argued that the year of establishment of the first kindergarten in Ethiopia was 1900 marking the moment when formal education began but misguided policies meant that very few children received an education. Demeke (2007) praised the Socialist revolution of 1966 as a turning point in the history of early childhood education in Ethiopia which resulted in the establishment of an independent commission called "Ethiopia Children's Commission" in 1973 with a task of caring for and educating Ethiopian children. To begin the task, a manual for kindergartens in Ethiopia was produced by the commission for the first time in 1974. After the revolution, kindergarten education expanded significantly from urban to rural areas in such a way that they grew in number from 77 to 912, accompanied by an enrollment growth of 7,573 to 102,000 from 1975 to 1990. Following the Socialist revolution of 1974, preschool education become part of the national education policy and then its curriculum was developed for the first time (Demeke, 2007). The new education and training policy in 1994 recognized kindergarten education as a very important element in the overall development of early childhood and for the preparation of formal schooling (MoE, 1994). According to MoE (2002), kindergarten education is the preschool preparatory education for children aged 4–6 and can take up to three years. In this program, children are offered a fun education that would enable them to express their feelings, to appreciate beauty, and to learn to distinguish and form letter and numbers. According to the document, the opening of kindergartens should be left to private investors and religious organizations, and to the parents who can afford to pay the fees. The government indirectly supports the initiative and provides professional pedagogical training, childcare, health, counseling, and advice for private kindergarten teachers. Furthermore, the government provides short-term training on how to improve their quality and efficiency in kindergarten education. MoE (2002) stressed that enrolment in kindergarten in Ethiopia is run by non-government organization, owned by community, missions, and private individuals, religious institutions wishing to enhance the involvement of the private sector in education and also maximize the government's efforts at other levels of education. The New

Education and Training Policy (1994), sets the aim of preschool education in the country as the all-round social, emotional, intellectual and physical development of the child in preparation for formal schooling. Based on this aim, MoE set different regional states of the country to adopt the general objectives of preschool education. The enrollment increased with time, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Statistical Feature of Kindergarten Education in Ethiopia

No	Item	Years					Average Growth Rate
		2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
1	Kindergarten Enrollments	219,068	263,484	292,641	341,315	382,741	15.0%
2	Number of KG Teachers	8,017	9,794	13,763	9,647	13,963	14.9%
3	Number of KG Schools	2,313	2,740	3,865	3,318	3,418	10.3%
4	Kindergarten Gross Enrollment Rate	3.10%	3.9%	4.20%	4.8%	5.2%	13.8%

Source: Educational Annual Abstract 2011

As the above table shows, kindergarten education enrollments increased significantly, with the average growth rate of 15% in the last five years. The general enrollment rate similarly improved, with an average growth rate of 13.8%. The number of schools and teachers increased with an average growth rate of 10.3% and 14.9% respectively.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Methods and Design of the Study

The research used survey research design and both qualitative (interview, document analysis and observation) and quantitative (questionnaire for teachers and principals) research approaches were employed for this study. The major methodological concern of the research was descriptive survey analysis and the interpretation of the responses to the

given questionnaires, interview, observation and document analysis in reference with the theoretical and practical framework of kindergarten education. The analysis and interpretation mainly emphasized the current practices and challenges of kindergarten education.

4.2 Sample Population and Sampling Techniques

The research used simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques to select a sample population for this study. More specifically, the lottery method random sampling technique was utilized to select sample schools. Stratified random sampling techniques were employed to select sample teachers. School principals were selected using available sampling and education quality, inspection and audit expertise was selected using purposive sampling techniques. The researcher used both primary (first-hand information) and secondary sources of data. As a primary source, the researcher used 5 education quality inspection and audit experts, 22 principals and 120 kindergarten teachers. Apart from this, various record documents such as teachers' qualifications, instructional material (curriculum material and guideline) and children's achievements and communication books were employed to secure secondary data.

4.3 Data Gathering Tools and Procedures of Data Collection

Educators have advocated the use of multiple methods of data collection, because by selecting complementary methods, a researcher can improve the weakness of one method with the strength of another. In line with this Hunter (1989), Patton (1987) as cited Yamane (2005) stated that using more than one data collection technique in a single study helps the researcher to substantiate the strength and correct the defect of any one source of data. Based on this idea, the researcher employed semi-structured interview, observation, document analysis and questionnaire as data gathering tools.

Questionnaires are advantageous for gathering data from a number of respondents at one place, making an economy of time and expense possible and providing a high proportion of usable responses (Best and Kahn, 2005). Therefore, based on the research questions and a review of

related literature, two set of questionnaires were prepared and administered for school principals and teachers. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions contained scale questions and particularly Likert type items on which the respondents showed their agreement. Open-ended questions were prepared to give subjects the chance to give a response in their own words. Observation can help to study all observable social phenomena in their natural setting as long as they are accessible (S. Sarankos, 2005.p 221). Based on this idea, the researcher used direct observation through an observation checklist consisting of three parts, meaning detailed instruction in the classroom and indoor-outdoor material and the physical plan of the school, interactions between kindergarten children, materials and teachers as well.

I used document analysis because it is a vital and relevant source for both qualitative and quantitative research and helps to yield information that is important in explaining social or educational practices (Best and Khan, 1993). Within this frame, the research reviewed significant document such as the number of students, teachers and qualifications of teachers and profile of children, the availability of curriculum materials, and other international children's rights documents. In addition to this, in qualitative research, interviewing is a major source of data needed for understanding the phenomenon under study (Merriam 1988). An interview is a kind of conversation with a purpose. A researcher interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about an issue – Robson (1993, p.227) as cited in Yamane Gama (2007). The researcher conducted interview with five Woreda education quality and audit experts.

4.4 Methods of Data Analysis

Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires via percentages, frequency and mean. The frequency in the table represents how many times a particular response appeared in different questions. The mean is the arithmetic average of a set of a given number. The frequency and mean score was utilized to analyze and describe the extent to which the problem featured in kindergarten education. The data obtained

through interviews, observation and document analysis was analyzed using narrative description (qualitative methods of analysis).

5. Analysis and Presentation of Data

This section deals with the presentation and interpretation of the data: 116 (96.7%) of 120 teachers and 21(95.5%) of 22 principals properly responded to the questionnaire. The researcher also analyzed and interpreted data gathered through qualitative methods, namely interview, observation and document analysis. The responses of each group were presented using a table followed by relevant discussion.

Table 2. Teachers and Principal qualification and ownership of training institution they attend

No	Items	Alternatives	Teachers		Principals	
			No	%	No	%
1.	Qualification of teacher and principals	Grade 10 complete	–	–	–	–
		Grade 12 complete	1	0.9	–	–
		Six months of KG teacher training	5	4.3	1	4.8
		One year of KG teacher training	64	55.2	3	14.3
		One year certificate (TTI)	14	12.1	5	23.8
		College diploma	23	19.8	5	23.8
		BA/BSC/BED	9	7.7	7	33.3
		Total	116	100	21	100
2.	Which training college did you attend (ownership of the institution)	Government	79	68.1	12	57.1
		Private	33	28.4	8	38.1
		Non-governmental organization	4	3.5	–	–
		Other	–	–	1	4.8
		Total	116	100	21	100

In terms of the qualifications of teachers and principals, most teachers – 64 (55.2%) – have had one year of kindergarten teacher training and a significant number of teachers – 23 (19.8%) – had a college diploma. On the other hand, most principals –7 (33.4%) – had a bachelor’s degree, while 5 (23.8%) of them have a college diploma and the same percentage possess the one year certificate (Teacher Training Institute). Only 1(4.8%) had six months of KG teacher training. It is difficult to ignore the problem because teachers and principals who lack basic knowledge and skills about child development and his/ her needs will not be able to meet the child’s physical, intellectual, social and emotional needs (UNESCO, 1982 Dereje, 1994). TGE (1994) asserts that starting from kindergarten to higher education it should be necessary to have the relevant teaching qualification and competency in the medium of instruction through pre-service and in-service training.

The reason for determining the pre-service training institution was related to the issue of the quality of training. Most teachers – 79 (68.1%) – graduated from a government teacher training institution and 33 (28.4%) from a private institution, with the rest from non-governmental organizations. Similarly most principals – 12 (57.1%) graduated from government teacher training institutions and the rest from private teacher training institutions. As we know, since 2003 the government of Ethiopia closed most private teacher training institutions because of a quality problem. However, a significant number of teachers and principals had already graduated from such institutions so they need supplementary training to be self-sufficient.

Table 3. Issues related with director training and information about *monthly fee*

No	Items	Principals	
		No	%
1	Were you trained to teach in kindergarten education	Yes	16 76.2
		No	5 23.8
		Total	21 100

2	Monthly tuition fee	100–150birr	–	–
		151–200birr	4	19.1
		201–250birr	2	9.6
		251–300birr	4	19.1
		301–350 birr	5	23.8
		351 and above	3	14.2
		Free from payment	3	14.2
		Total	21	100

As can be seen from table 3, 16 (76.2%) of the principals confirmed that they have had training for the kindergarten education program while 5 (23.8%) have not. This cannot simply be ignored because if principals are without basic knowledge and skills, it may be difficult to facilitate the teaching/learning processes.

We attempted to find out the amount of fees charged each month by the kindergartens under the study. As table 3 shows, the largest percentage of students – 5 (23.8%) – paid monthly fees ranging from between 301–350 birr. Furthermore, 4 (19.4%) of the respondents indicated that the monthly fees are between 251–300 birr and the same percentage of respondents indicated that they paid 151–200. 3 (14.2%) paid monthly fees of 351 and above and 2 (9.6%) paid between 201–250 birr. The remainder – 3 (14.2%) – were owned by the government and were free from fees. The monthly fees have increased gradually and many parents cannot afford to pay the private schools fee. Further, it would be much more difficult for the same parents who have two or more children. The major challenges of kindergarten education include poor availability to most children and especially children from low socio-economic backgrounds (MOE, MOWA, MOH, 2010). Because of high fees, a significant number of children miss out on a kindergarten education and this may strongly affect the long lasting life of the children.

Table 4. Issue related to adequacy of teacher training

No	Item	More than adequate		Adequate		Somewhat adequate		Not so adequate		Not adequate		Mean	Total	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		No	%
1	Initial training provided for kindergarten teachers	25	21.5	32	27.6	22	19.8	27	23.3	10	8.6	3.3	116	100
2	The training that you received was sufficient for the many tasks in kindergarten	24	20.7	32	27.6	23	19.8	29	25	8	6.9	3.3	116	100
3	On-job training and orientation provided for KG teachers	19	16.4	35	30.2	21	18.1	28	24.1	13	11.2	3.1	116	100
4	Training provided for kindergarten teaching assistants	11	9.5	30	25.8	30	25.8	36	31	9	7.7	2.9	116	100
Aggregate mean												3.15		

As table 4 above indicated, most teachers responded that the initial training that kindergarten teachers were provided with was somewhat adequate. The mean value of teacher responses was 3.3. Regarding whether the program prepared them sufficiently well for the manifold tasks in kindergarten, most teachers responded that it had been somewhat adequate, the mean value of the teacher response being similar to that of initial training. With regard to on-job training and orientation provided for kindergarten teachers, most of the respondents said that it was somewhat adequate, the mean value of the teacher response was 3.1. Table 4 item 4 indicated that the largest number of respondents – 36 (31%) – agreed that the training provided for kindergarten assistance teacher was not so adequate. Kindergarten teachers perform a complex and multidimensional role, they are responsible for implementing a program that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, integrated, developmentally appropriate, and culturally and linguistically responsive, and that promotes positive outcomes for all children (McDonnell, 1999). *Teaching assistants* were also involved directly in the care and education of groups and individuals, child with special needs, in planning and delivering the curriculum, in preparing the materials and activities, recording, assessment and review (Iain

Macleod and Brudenell, 2004). Hence, it is possible to conclude that both kindergarten main teachers and assistants need additional in-service training such as seminars, workshops and short-term training courses for successful kindergarten curriculum implementation.

Table 5. Issue related to adequacy of principal training

No	Item	More than adequate		Adequate		Somewhat adequate		Not so adequate		Not adequate		Mean	Total	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		No	%
1	Initial training provided for kindergarten principal	3	14.2	5	23.8	2	9.6	5	23.8	6	28.6	2.7	21	100
2	Training that you got enough for multitude of tasks the KG	3	14.2	6	28.6	2	9.6	5	23.8	5	23.8	2.8	21	100
3	On-job training and orientation provided for kindergarten principal	1	4.7	5	23.8	2	9.6	9	42.8	4	19.1	2.5	21	100
4	Participation in workshop on ECCE policy framework and on its implementation	–	–	5	23.8	3	14.2	6	28.6	7	33.4	2.3	21	100
Aggregate mean												2.57		

As the above table indicates, the largest group of respondents – 6(28.6%) – agreed that the initial training provided by kindergarten principals was inadequate. The remaining 5(23.8%) said adequate, 5(23.8%) not so adequate, 3(14.2%) more than adequate and 2(9.6%) said somewhat adequate. The second item in table 5 shows the opinion on the adequacy of the training that principals got to the multitude of tasks in their kindergarten. 6 principals (28.6%) responded that it was adequate the other 3(14.2%) said more than adequate, 2(9.6%) somewhat adequate, 5(23.8%) said not so adequate and 5(23.8%) inadequate. This reveals that a significant number of principals in the studied kindergarten lack the necessary training to play their role in kindergarten education.

Regarding the on-job training and orientation provided for kindergarten principals, the largest group of principals – 9 (42.8%) responded

that their training was not so adequate. The remaining 1 (4.7%) said more than adequate, 5 (23.8%) said adequate, 2 (9.6%) said somewhat adequate and 4 (19.1%) inadequate. Adequately trained principals are crucial to ensure the quality of kindergarten education. Hence, it is possible to say that kindergarten principals in the studied kindergarten need additional training to facilitate the teaching and learning process properly.

As indicated in the fourth item of table 5, the last question deals with the adequacy of principal participation in a workshop on ECCE policy framework and its implementation. Accordingly, most of the principals 7(33.4%) responded that their participation in the workshop was inadequate. The rest 6 (28.6%), 3 (14.2%) and 5 (23.8%) of respondents replied that their participation were not so adequate, somewhat adequate and adequate, respectively. Principals run different activities in today's schools including administrative manager, instructional leader and communication manager in all aspects of the teaching and learning process (Smith, 1990). Hence, professional knowledge and training in these areas is important for appropriately practicing the above-mentioned activities, provided support and to conduct educational research, which is crucial to perform educational activities.

Table 6. Principal responses about availability of human resource

No	Item	Very high		High		Medium		Low		Very low		Mean
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1	Availability of trained principal in the market	1	4.7	4	19.1	3	14.2	9	42.9	4	19.1	2.5
2	Availability of trained teacher	6	28.6	4	19.1	6	28.6	5	23.8	–	–	3.5
3	Availability of trained assistance teacher in the market	2	9.6	2	9.6	8	38.1	8	38.1	1	4.7	2.8
4	Availability of trained guardian in the market	–	–	1	4.7	6	28.6	6	28.6	8	38.1	2.0
5	Availability of janitor and guard in the market	1	4.7	3	14.2	3	14.2	7	33.4	7	33.4	2.2
Aggregate mean											2.6	

As indicated in table 6, most principals 9 (42.9%) responded that the availability of trained principals in the market was low, the rest responded: 4 (19.1%) very low, 3 (14.2%) medium, 4 (19.1%) high and 1 (4.7%) very high. The mean value of the principals response was 2.5. This shows that the availability of trained principal in the market is low. Regarding the availability of trained teachers on the market, most principals responded that it was medium, the mean value of the principals response was 3.5. The availability of trained teaching assistants in the market was close to medium, the mean value of the principals' response was 2.8. The availability of trained guardians, janitors and guards was very low and low, respectively. The mean value of the principal response for guardians was 2.0 and for janitors and guards, 2.2. Principals and education quality experts at the Woreda level reported that the availability of trained teachers was medium but most of them are not competent and qualified to teach children. Furthermore, the lack of trained and qualified principals and teaching assistants was one of the major challenges in kindergarten education. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the kindergarten education sector needs well trained and qualified principals, teachers and assistants. Kindergarten teachers play a vital role in the development of children and qualified teachers are indispensable for a sound kindergarten program. A special kind of education is necessary to develop kindergarten teachers who are able to guide each child in their charge towards their optimum development (Wills and Stegeman, 1956).

Table 7. Principal Response on Issues Related to Availability of Curriculum Material

No	Item	Principal response				Total	
		Yes		No		No	%
		No	%	No	%		
1	Is Education and Training Policy available in your school?	8	38.1	13	61.9	21	100
2	Are there kindergarten education manuals in your school?	12	57.2	9	42.8	21	100
3	Is there a syllabus in your school?	18	85.8	3	14.2	21	100
4	Are there kindergarten standards in your school?	15	71.4	6	28.6	21	100

5	Are there guidelines for preschool education in your school?	6	28.6	15	71.4	21	100
6	Are there guidelines for educating children with special needs?	1	4.8	20	95.2	21	100
7	Is the UN convention on the rights of the child in your school?	8	38.1	13	61.9	21	100
8	Are there textbooks in your school?	8	38.1	13	61.9	21	100
9	Are there teacher guides in your school?	3	14.2	18	85.8	21	100

Based on the information from principals shown in table 7, 13 (61.9%) of kindergarten schools do not have the Education Training Policy document. Most kindergartens – 18 (85.8%) – have a syllabus and 12 (57.2%) a kindergarten manual. With regard to the new standards of kindergartens, most schools – 15 (71.4%) have the new standard prepared by the Ministry of Education, but as the education quality officer reported, during the interview most of them admitted that they do not use the syllabus properly or fulfill the materials based on the standards. Most of the kindergartens – 15 (71.4%) do not have guidelines for preschool education and 20 (95.2%) of kindergartens do not have them for children with special needs. This means that kindergarten education in the studied area was not inclusive and discriminated children with special needs. The kindergartens cannot accept and treat children with special needs properly. It is important to see what the world did about children’s rights. However, most kindergartens – 13 (61.9%) – did not have the United Nation Convention on the rights of the child in the studied area.

Regarding student textbooks and teacher’s guides, 18 (85.8%), 13 (61.9%) of kindergartens do not have textbooks and teacher’s guides, respectively. Observations in the classroom were made to check to what extent teachers use the materials. However, most teachers cannot use the materials and instead preferred different textbooks which served as student texts which had been imported from abroad and prepared in a foreign language and context without the acknowledgement of the government. Teachers, principals and education quality and audit experts reported that the education bureau had not supplied the necessary materials for the kindergarten adequately. Accordingly, a significant number of kindergartens prepared a textbook without considering the maturity level of the

children, the environment and the demands of the government and they found their own ways to get other curriculum materials. Based on the above information it is possible to conclude that there was a lack of governmentally prepared textbooks, teacher’s guides, guidelines for preschool education and guidelines for educating children with special needs, whilst other international documents such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child or Education and Training Policy were not accessible. In addition, a further problem of the proper implementation of standards were the challenges in the practices of kindergarten education in the study area.

Table 8. Issues related to competencies of kindergarten human resources

No	Item	Respondent		5	4	3	2	1	Mean	Total
1	Directors’ ability to develop, manage and apply a variety of management strategies to support KG teachers	TR	FR	22	25	25	34	10	3.1	116
		DR	FR	6	5	4	5	1	3.5	21
2	Directors’ ability to build, facilitate and maintain working relationships with parents and other care givers to enhance student learning	TR	FR	28	20	18	39	11	3.1	116
		DR	FR	5	4	4	7	1	3.2	21
3	Teachers’ ability to monitor, assess, record and report student learning outcomes	TR	FR	43	22	19	26	6	3.6	116
		DR	FR	7	5	5	3	1	3.6	21
4	Teachers’ Mastery of Education and Training Policy	TR	FR	21	20	21	37	17	2.9	116
		DR	FR	1	4	2	8	6	2.3	21
5	Teachers’ ability to teach kindergarten students	TR	FR	33	26	24	28	5	3.4	116
		DR	FR	6	4	7	4	–	3.6	21
6	Teachers’ ability to prepare weekly and daily lesson plans	TR	FR	48	29	19	16	4	3.87	116
		DR	FR	10	8	2	1	–	4.3	21
7	Teacher’s understanding of the early childhood education and commitment to their professionalism	TR	FR	19	22	24	41	10	2.99	116
		DR	FR	3	6	3	7	2	3.0	21
8	Teaching assistant’s knowledge to teach children	TR	FR	18	26	24	44	4	2.48	116
		DR	FR	3	5	8	5	–	3.28	21
9	Teaching assistant’s ability to facilitate student learning	TR	FR	22	29	23	36	6	3.2	116
		DR	FR	4	8	5	4	–	3.57	21
10	Guardian ability to care for children and enhance student learning	TR	FR	19	26	21	39	11	3.0	116
		DR	FR	5	4	6	3	3	3.2	21
Aggregate mean		TR							3.16	
		DR							3.34	

NB: FR=frequency, DR=director, TR= teachers: 5= Very High, 4= High, 3=Medium, 2= Low and 1= Very low

The above table indicated that most of the respondents agreed that the director's ability to develop, manage and apply varieties of management strategies to support kindergarten teachers was medium, the mean value of the teacher and director response was 3.1 and 3.5, respectively. The role of principals is indispensable to work in partnership with teachers, parents and caregivers to ensure that each child has access to the best possible educational experience. Facilitating student learning, informing how teachers plan, develop, manage and apply varieties of teaching strategies to support quality student learning is the competency of directors for their success. In order to achieve this objective it's necessary for the director to obtain management skills. Similarly, most teachers and directors agreed that their ability to build, facilitate and maintain work relation with parents and other care givers may enhance student learning. The mean value of teacher and director response were both 3.2. Without the active participation of parents and caregivers, it is difficult to fulfil the aim and goals of kindergarten education. Hence, a directorial ability to build, facilitate and maintain work relation with all parties involved in the educational process determines the successful partnership.

As table 8, item three shows, most teachers and directors replied that teachers' ability to monitor assess, record and report student learning outcomes was high, and the mean value of teacher and director responses was similarly 3.6. McDonnell (1999) describes that the early childhood teacher's role is having the knowledge of child development and growth, child observation, record and assessment. The ability to monitor, assess, record and report student learning outcomes is among the five teacher competencies expected from the Ethiopian teacher (MoE, 2002). The researcher made document analysis and observed that teachers continuously assess, record and report student learning outcomes and other behavior to their parents through a communication book. This was an encouraging experience in the current practice of kindergarten education. Regarding teachers' mastery of Education and Training Policy, most teachers and directors said that teachers' mastery of Education and Training Policy was medium and low, some of them even though they did not have access to see what the document dealt with. The mean value

of teacher and director responses was 2.9 and 2.3, respectively. Mastery of Education and Training Policy (ETP), curriculum and other program development are competencies expected from the Ethiopian teacher (MoE, 2002). Teachers' understanding about education and training policy contributed a lot to the curriculum and the implementation of other programmes in line with the objective stated.

Regarding teachers' ability to teach kindergarten children, most respondents agreed that teachers' ability to teach kindergarten children was between medium and high, the mean value of the teacher response was 3.4, close to medium, and the director response was 3.6, close to high. However, education quality experts reported during the interview that the one year (10 month) kindergarten teacher training was not enough to cope with the multitude of tasks in the kindergarten education program and they stated that the low quality of kindergarten human resources was a major challenge in kindergarten education. Teachers must create and support a learning environment in which children construct their own knowledge through play and social interaction whilst balancing direct teaching with play (Montessori, 1963). Hence, teachers' ability determines all the activity in the teaching/learning process in the kindergarten. Therefore, continuous training about how to teach is advisable for the successful implementation of the program.

As table 8 item 6 indicated, teachers' ability to prepare weekly and daily lesson plan was high, the mean value of the teacher and director response was 3.8 and 4.3, respectively. The researcher made document analysis and observed that teachers indeed prepare weekly and daily lesson plans and the plans are checked by directors at the end of the week. The problem is the lack of uniformity in the format, stating objectives and the fact that the objectives in general are not specific, measurable, achievable, reliable, and time bounded. Similarly, item seven indicated that teachers' understanding of early childhood education and commitment to their profession was medium, the mean value of teachers and directors response were 2.99 and 3.0, respectively. Education is a dynamic process, so teachers' involvement in continuous professional development program and contribution to the professional develop-

ment program of their colleagues is a competency expected from teachers (MoE, 2002). Teachers, principals and education quality experts reported that the absence of updating and upgrading programs led teachers to move outside the teaching profession, such as accounting and other business area, creating a lack of commitment to their profession. It is important to recommend that including and cascading continuous professional development program/ updating and upgrading program/ up to kindergarten level is crucial for the successful implementation of the kindergarten curriculum.

With regard to teaching assistant's knowledge of how to teach kindergarten children, the mean value of the teacher response was between low and medium which was 2.48 while the director response was close to medium, 3.28. The document analysed by the researcher showed that most teaching assistants had completed 10th or 12th and they did not get the training provided for a kindergarten teacher. Teaching assistants were involved directly in the care and education of groups and individuals, children with special needs, in planning and delivering the curriculum, in preparing materials and activities, recording, assessment and reviews. They should have detailed knowledge of the curriculum, foundation, child development and community in which they work (Iain Macleod and Brudenell, 2004). Similarly, teaching assistant's ability to facilitate student learning was medium, the mean value of teacher and director response was 3.2 and 3.57, respectively. There is no controversy about the importance of teaching assistants in the practice of kindergarten education but no institutions train just teaching assistants in the country. This was one of the challenges – there are not many teaching assistants in the market and because of this kindergartens insist on using other opportunities, employing 10th and 12th grade (and even below 10th grade) people as teaching assistants.

Regarding guardians most of the respondent teachers and directors said that the guardian's ability to care and enhance student learning was medium, the mean value of teacher and director response were 3.0 and 3.2, respectively. The researcher made document analysis regarding the qualifications of guardians, most of them were 8th and 10th grade

graduates, and also a significant number of kindergartens did not have a guardian. This created a work burden on the main teacher, because the main role of the teaching assistant and guardian is to support the main teacher and share the multitude of tasks in the practice of kindergarten education. Guardians are expected to understand the needs of the child based on their level, development, knowledge and ability, so that commitment of the guardian is fundamental in the program implementation.

Interview and Observation Analysis about the Practices of KG Education: The researcher observed that most teachers used play based instruction, illustrating stories and learning by song in the classroom. A significant number of teachers used dramatization, discussion and lecturing methods in classroom instruction. Most teachers used straight line seating arrangement because of the large number of students in a small classroom. The majority of teachers were required to prepare lesson plans which were checked by principals at the end of the week. Teachers always tried to check student exercises, this is an encouraging trend but they lack the proper usage of teaching aids. Nearly all teachers used the mother tongue language to teach children but sometimes they used English as an instructional language. The researcher observed that a limited number of teachers encourage child centered learning and independent activities. Teaching numbers and alphabets in the context of student development and level lack uniformity, with some teachers and schools teaching beyond the limits of the syllabus and this may result in learning difficulties for children. The assessment mechanism of teachers varies from school to school; some schools used grading and other used marking, except in very limited kindergartens where the assessment mechanisms to check student progress were not appropriate, being formally similar to that of primary and secondary level.

Regarding outdoor materials, the researcher observed the following material student ratio, for example slide (1:177), merry-go-round (1:24), ladder (1:175), sand box (available only in one kindergarten), tires (1:186) and seesaws (1:46) and these were not adequate. Since play is an impor-

tant way of teaching children, appropriate and sufficient indoor and outdoor materials are mandatory. When we come to indoor materials, the researcher observed that the blocks, pictorial books, art materials, shop corners, family corners, health corners, music corners, mathematics corner, table toys and pictorial teaching aids were inadequate in the average kindergarten. Kindergartens in the study area have child-sized chairs and tables and have somewhat appropriate shelves – this was an encouraging trend.

Most kindergarten buildings were to some extent conducive, neat and decorated areas, free from noise. However, the dining and rest rooms were not and less conducive, respectively. In addition, they lack first aid materials and a first aid room and kit. Kindergartens in the study area had somewhat conducive administrative rooms, toilet, water, and decorated classrooms. With regard to the average observed number of children, those who enjoy kindergarten program total 3,540 in an area of 2528.57 square meters. This means that on average 1.4 meters square is available for a child. On average, the child-teachers ratio was 1:33. Principals, teacher and education quality experts reported that proper attention was not given from the government in providing land for building kindergartens, because the required 63-meter square classroom size and 1.55 meter square per child MoE (2003) cannot be fulfilled by private kindergartens. It is possible to say that most kindergarten classrooms were inappropriate to teach children in. Besides the poor classroom condition, most of them were not ventilated, not well equipped with corners and outdoor play materials. Due to the narrowness of the classroom, children were unable to relax. The researcher observed that 13 (59.1%) of kindergartens were not constructed for the purpose of a kindergarten. Only 5 (22.7%) kindergartens had a dining room, 11 (50%) have rest rooms, 8 (36.3%) have a staff room, 19 (86.3%) kindergartens have an administrative room but all are inappropriate based on the standard. Most of the teachers, principals and education quality experts agreed that the practice of kindergarten education was not free from difficulty, among the fundamental problems some of them they pointed out were as follows:

- 1) Lack of structured teacher training institution for KG teachers and other personnel,
- 2) Lack of appropriate building or school constructed for the purpose of kindergarten,
- 3) Textbooks, teachers guides, syllabuses, policy documents, manuals, national and international legal directives prepared by government are not available in most kindergartens,
- 4) Lack of appropriate indoor and outdoor play materials, rest room, dining room, water, toilet, first aid room and kit, registration of under age children; lack of parent participation and inattention to the program are major problems in the implementation process.
- 5) Lack of on the job training for teachers and principals in the area of child development, care and education; lack of continuous professional supervision and support from woredas,
- 6) Lack of uniformity on the implementation of the program, access, equity, quality and standardization problem were major challenges in Ethiopian kindergarten education,
- 7) Parents and schools are highly concentrated only for English language and give low emphasis to child first language results in learning difficulties, teaching children without considering the limitations of the syllabus. The stage and age level of the children still represents a bottleneck,
- 8) Lack of trained and qualified teachers, relatively short period of training for teachers. Low salary resulting in high teacher turnover and creating a shortage of qualified teachers.

To this end, Curtis(1998) noted that kindergarten classrooms were generally placed at the corner of the building with their own entrance, playground and providing large areas of space to allow for a flexible and stimulating environment. Therefore, to trim down the above major problems, the subject under the study advances the following proposed conclusion and recommendations.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

In Ethiopia, despite the fact that 10 decades have passed since kindergarten education began, its quality as well as availability for the preschool age children of the country has been very low. From the above findings and discussion, the following conclusions were drawn.

With regard to indoor or classroom materials of the kindergarten, most of the preschool lacks appropriate child-sized chairs and tables, blocks, pictorial books, art materials, corners such as shop corners, family corners, health corners, music corners, mathematics corners, table toys and pictorial teaching aids in the sample kindergarten. Similarly, the outdoor materials of the kindergarten are not appropriate to child development, with insufficient features such as a slide, merry-go-round, ladder, sand box, tyres, and seesaws. Since play is an important way of teaching children, appropriate and sufficient indoor and outdoor materials are necessary for the successful realization of kindergarten education.

The physical environment of the kindergarten is less conducive to children's development, most of kindergarten buildings have not been constructed for the purpose of kindergarten and are not conducive, neat, decorated or silent enough. Similarly, the dining and rest room are not appropriate, there is a lack of appropriate playgrounds when compared to the number of children that need the facility. Kindergartens in the study area have not very conducive administrative rooms, toilets, and water facilities. It is possible to say that most of the kindergarten classrooms were not appropriate to teaching children.

Curriculum material implementation is inconsistent and does not consider children's needs. Preschools do not have enough textbooks, teachers' guides, culturally relevant storybooks, syllabuses and they lack of curriculum frameworks and standards at kindergarten. With regard to the quality of kindergarten human resources, the program has faced a lack of qualified and trained human resources (teachers, guardians and teaching assistants or caregivers), low salary of teachers causing

a high rotation, a lack of community participation, and supervision and support were the major negative factors hindering the successful implementation of kindergarten education.

The difficulty mentioned above observably affects children's interest towards learning and schooling, mental and developmental needs, physical development and social development as well. To change this, the collaborative work of parents, investors, colleges, the government, non-governmental organizations, educational expertise and the media is necessary.

6.2 Recommendations for Potential Improvement

Based on the above findings and conclusions the following suggestions and recommendations are provided to reduce the problems and advance the practice of kindergarten education sector in the country.

- 1) The pre-service training term of teachers needs to be increased to a relatively longer period, perhaps from two to three years. It should be focused more deeply on preschool education related courses such as health, social development, mental or cognitive development, child psychology and moral development to enable the kindergarten education system to be more effective. Furthermore, certain organizational improvements have to be made for the preschool training institutions in government and private sector in quality and quantity so that they are able to produce quality human resources (principals, teachers, assistants and guardians).
- 2) Providing appropriate in-service training in collaboration with government, NGOs and investors involved in the sector for kindergarten teachers and other personnel including experts on preschool education is irreplaceable in promoting the practice of quality kindergarten education.
- 3) Creating and developing awareness of the community and other people interested in the issue concerning the crucial aspects that may help to reduce the problems and successfully implement the program aiming at the improvement of kindergarten education.

- 4) In most kindergartens, indoor and outdoor teaching (play) materials are limited. However, play is not only the business of the child but also an essential medium of instruction for the preschool education program. Thus, to alleviate the current shortage of play material, establishing a preschool material production center is important. Middle and small enterprises may produce materials and equipment such as merry-go-rounds, seesaws, ladders, slides and swings with the support of the government. In addition, teachers have to know how to produce simple and local play materials.
- 5) It is important to take immediate measures to prepare developmentally appropriate and relevant curriculum materials, print and distribute the kindergarten textbooks, teacher's guides, syllabuses, standards and other related directives to kindergartens with proper improvement – this should be done by Addis Ababa education bureau in collaboration with city administration and it will help to make the practice of kindergarten education implementation uniform.
- 6) Woreda education officials and experts ought to implement standards and force private kindergarten owners to provide the children and teachers with basic facilities such as dining rooms, rest rooms, offices, toilets, water and first aid rooms and consider the appropriateness of presenting the physical plan before giving the license. They should also continuously follow up after licensing the institution.
- 7) The city administration is supposed to promote and encourage private investors by providing land at a discount to construct buildings for the purpose of kindergartens and supervise the private owners as to whether they construct buildings for the purpose of kindergartens based on their contractual responsibility and liability.
- 8) Finally, this study is limited in many respects, further and in-depth investigations have to be made in order to disclose the underlying problems, which can help to come up with more valuable findings that would influence decision makers, planners, the state and the public.

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