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**Indigenization of Early Childhood Education (ECCE) in Ethiopia:  
“A goiter on mumps” in ECCE provisions**Belay Tefera <sup>1</sup> and Belay Hagos <sup>2</sup>*Received: 15 December 2016; Accepted: 10 August 2017*

**Abstract:** Conceptions, design, and delivery of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) need to be indigenized so that it can be more relevant, purposive and sustainable. This paper explored ECCE indigenization concerns in Ethiopia employing secondary sources and (primary) data generated through in-depth interviews with young children, facilitators, guardians (parents and grandparents), and administrative personnel in three peri-urban ECCE centers. It was noted that the contexts and experiences of ECCE are such that goals and methods of child upbringing, care, and education built in to the communities have been changing. Evidences seemed to indicate that there is, on the one hand, an apostasy from such traditional methods over the years in favor of ‘modern’ practices and, on the other hand, these modern practices were introduced externally, inaccessible to a greater majority, not modern as they claim to be, and, to add pain to the sickness, are less indigenized and not rooted into the communities. ECCE policy documents and standards governing implementation didn’t seem to encourage indigenization initiatives. Curricular materials particularly in private centers were largely imported. Although the Ministry of Education has designed a central curriculum guide, the contents seemed largely to be adaptations from others. No major initiative was observed to incorporate locally produced resources for educational purposes. Use of local languages is in fact much better in rural centers but seemed to be a serious concern in urban areas where English is more preferred. These concerns of indigenization were also evident even in the physical set up of ECCE centers as they hardly captured the community features. Hence, it was generally concluded that indigenization of ECCE was a serious concern that seemed to add a ‘goiter’ on ECCE’s existing “mumps” (i.e. the problem of access).

**Key words:** ECCE, childcare, preschools, priest schools, indigenization.

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## Introduction

Ethiopia is a country with a longer history of early years' indigenous education. Rooted in the traditional Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Pankhurst, 1955), this education begun with the introduction of Christianity as early as 4<sup>th</sup> c. (Pankhurst, 1955). This early education was recognized, for example, in the works of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopian philosophers, Zär'aYa'aqob and his disciple WäldäHaywat (Sumner, 1986), writing about their early years' education, their advises to parents about its importance and how to do it. Evidences indicate that at least male children were able to attend priest school education to learn reading scriptural literature (Negash, 1996). Many such schools function to this date, thus forming one of the oldest continuous systems of education in the world (Wagaw, 1979). Following the expansion of Islam along the western and northern Africa, Islamic education was also introduced in Ethiopia in the 7<sup>th</sup>c resulting in the opening of Quranic schools that teach early Arabic reading to Muslim children (Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh, &Ekkehard, 2006). Early year's child care and socialization have rather been comprehensively embedded in more indigenous practices of the Oromos' Gadda System (Firdissa, 2017). Exploring this local system would obviously suggest a number of good practices that can be scaled up nationally.

In fact, the first modern preschool (kindergarten) was established in Dire Dawa (a town in the eastern part of the Country) for the children of French consultants who were helping build the first railroad in Ethiopia (Demeke, 2003); eight years prior to the first public school. Years later, a number of other private pre-schools were gradually started attached to such other foreign-based educational institutions as the English School, the German School, the Lycee Gebre Mariam...and give services for children of the well-to-do parents in Addis Ababa. However, modern preschool as a general public service began in August 1963, with pilot projects established at the Community Centers in Ras Desta Sefer (Addis Ababa), Debre Zeit, Debre Berhan, Awassa and Asmara under the then Ministry of National Community

Development and Social Affairs (MNCDSA Report, 1972). By the year 1972, there were more than 30 privately owned preschools mostly in the Addis Ababa area; and 30 preschools in both rural and urban areas sponsored by the Ministry of National Community Development and Social Affairs (MNCDSA, 1972) and headed by Village Level Workers.

The 1974 socialist revolution rather seemed to herald remarkable development in the history of modern early childhood education in Ethiopia. It was felt that the success of the revolution wouldn't be possible without the full participation of women in the public spheres and this has resulted in establishment of many childcare centers and kindergartens to free women from routine home chores including childcare. Accordingly, there has been a tremendous rise in the number of KGs as well as enrollment of children. During this period, major changes also emerged in the expansion of preschools location-wise; a tendency to move towards the rural areas along the then National Literacy Campaign (MoLSA&MoE, 1982 E.C). Moreover, for the first time in the history of the Country, preschool education became part of the national education policy (NCC, 1974 E.C.) having its own national preschool curriculum (MoE, 1973 E.C), standard (NCC, 1974 E.C.) and a preschool education teachers' guide (NCC 1974 E.C).

With the fall of the Socialist regime, the ECCE business seemed to go to a state of silence at first as it was considered a low government priority (ESDP I, 1997; ESDP II, 2002) but then started to kick off from the late 1990s. A resurgence of interest surfaced out towards the end of the first decade of the EPRDF's government rule due in part to external (mainly the international child rights movement) as well as internal forces (mainly the rising number of preschools that needed government regulation). These interacting internal and external factors were able to fuel (1) formulation of the ECCE policy framework (MoE, MoWA, and MoH, 2010a,b,c), preparation of the fourth Education Sector Development Program that streamlined ECCE for the first time (ESDP IV, 2010), the ECCE standard (MoE, 1995) and curricula (MoE, 2001 E.C), (2) establishment of ECCE centers for children and

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capacity building colleges for facilitators in the various regions, and (3) laying out administrative structure in which ECCE focal persons and supervisors were placed at the various levels of the government ranging from the federal down the road to the lowest echelon, or the kebele, and (4) implementation exercises that improved the General Gross Enrollment from 2.1 % in 1990- at the time the present government ascended to power (EMIS, 1990)- to a total of 49.5% in 2016 (MoE/EMIS, 2016).

Having gone through a lengthy process of development, ECCE in Ethiopia has generally achieved now its own policy framework, national curriculum, and standards for regulating the quality of ECCE provisions. While teacher training colleges in the various regions of the country have embarked on training of ECCE facilitators with a diploma level training undergraduate and graduate programs are already initiated in the various universities of the country. More importantly, in order to ensure accessibility of services to young children, ECCE has now been delivered through different modalities that range from the most expensive, less accessible three years preschool education program to a one year, low-cost, culture-sensitive and seemingly innovative school readiness programs (Belay & Belay, 2015)-that have significantly improved, access and promise high prospect of scalability and feasibility in the Ethiopia soil to addressing the needs of rural children as well as marginalized urban children. These two programs are child-to-child initiative and O-class. Child-to-child is a non-formal program in which older children, already in school, are paired with younger children to mentor and prepare them for starting school through a series of structured play-like weekly activities and monthly workshops using materials especially prepared for the program. O-Class is, on the other hand, a formal school readiness program for children aged 5-6 years that is conducted within the premises of government primary school. Both of them were, however, found incarcerated with lots of implementation problems that would cloud on these possibilities (Belay & Belay, 2015; Tirussew, Belay & Girma, 2017). For example, as a new program O-Class was found to have

many problems that require reestablishing it as an independent program with its own identity, services, and system; upgrading the professional competence of actors involved in the program delivery; carrying out some construction and maintenance to make services more accessible to children; preparing aids and resources including arrangement of some feeding program; building partnership among stakeholders; and establishing at least one demonstration O-Class in each woreda to show how it works right (Tirussew & Belay, 2016).

In its longer span of development, ECCE in Ethiopia has also attracted different research investigations during the socialist regime (e.g. MoE, 1971 E.C.; 1995a; AAEOPU, 1978 E.C.; Hailesellasie, 1979 E.C; MoLSA&MoE, 1982 E.C; Habtamu, 1996), after this regime (e.g. Hoot et al., 2004; UNESCO, 2006; Teferra et al., 2007; Tirussew, 2007; Tirussew et al., 2009) and most recently (e.g. Fantahun, 2013; Girma, 2014; Orkin et al., 2012). The major recurrent theme in this research has been, among others, the problem of ECCE access and quality. It has been repeatedly shown that ECCE coverage is quite small compared to millions of underserved children particularly in the rural areas and the urban poor. Preschools are nearly non-existent in rural areas, few children (males) may have access to traditional schools (Tirussew, 2007), while many others engage in work (Young Lives, 2012) with little time left for education. In the urban centers, too, private ECCE is accessible only to very few wealthy families. Professionals, authorities, researchers, and practitioners commonly indicate that ECCE so far has seriously suffered from accessibility concerns on top of such quality concerns that relate to human, material, and financial resources. However, few investigations, if any, were conducted to unveil issues of relevance and indigenization of ECCE in general.

The aim of this research is to explore concerns of ECCE indigenization in Ethiopia in terms of use of local languages, educational and curriculum materials, plays and games, stories and songs, and incorporation of locally produced materials. It is hypothesized that the

concerns of ECCE indigenization in Ethiopia is like an added sickness (a “goiter”) to the existing pain (i.e. problem of access or “mumps”).

### **ECCE indigenization: Conceptualization and principles**

Different theories (e.g. socio-cultural, ecological, developmental niche, and socio-ontological) have underscored that child development, learning and education are rooted into socio-cultural and physical environments. These socio-cultural and physical environments take different forms spatially and historically (Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1977), present a variety of tasks and demands (Super & Harkness, 1986), and engage humans through various interacting mechanisms, resources, agents, and tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Children are to acquire knowledge through contacts and interactions with these environments as the first step (interpsychological plane), then later assimilate and internalize this knowledge adding their personal value (intrapsychological plane) to it. Parents and competent peers are representatives of the culture and the mechanisms through which the culture passes into the child with language as a tool (Vygotsky, 1978). The socio-cultural environment that is brought into contact with the child through interaction and language is not arbitrary (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Super & Harkness, 1986). Rather, it is hierarchically organized as a nested arrangement of structures (called microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems) where each structure is contained within the next allowing child development move towards more complex, wider, and enriching contexts, relationships, and networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This non-arbitrary environment that is organized into three interacting subsystems (Physical and social settings of the child’s everyday life, customs and practices of child rearing and the psychology of caretakers) guides the developmental niche having a particular child at the center to inhabiting a different cultural ‘world’ than the world inhabited by other members of his/ her family. Each of the three subsystems of the niche repeatedly emphasizes (or with singular salience) the culture’s core messages for acquisition of skills and values through the process of mutual

adaptation with the individual child (Super & Harkness, 1986). In the African developmental landscape, this developmental niche is rooted into the eco-cultural world view so characteristic of Africa where children themselves are partakers and argentic of their own life (survival, learning and development) surprisingly in an age their western contemporaries are only treated with care and delicacy. Parental and sibling stimulation starts in the early years of children to enable them seek out others from whom they would get local knowledge (Nsamenang, 1992).

Based on the theoretical positions above, we can deduce the following basic underpinning premises guiding indigenous early year's education and care.

- Indigenous children live in a wide variety of circumstances. Many live in families that have strong traditions, and cultural orientation with little formal education. Early childhood program for indigenous children may not necessarily be patterned after those in existence in urban or industrial cities but should be community-based that would meet the needs of indigenous children and their families (Awopegba, duolowu, & Nsamenang (2013).
- Learning assumes a more impactful, meaningful and relevant role when the cultural background and experience of children are taken into cognizance. Indigenous ECCE enable children to develop their cultural identity. This is made possible when children are rooted in their indigenous knowledge and skills. Indigenous knowledge equips children with cultural values, and practices in their environments. It provides the platform on which elements of culture can form and shape the personality of the child. According to Serpell (1993), schools are expected to promote economic progress, transmit culture, and cultivate children's intellectual and moral development.
- Quality ECCE programs are, among other things, rooted in the communities themselves (Enriquez, 1993). ECCE programs that are indigenized are better positioned to cherish much strength in

the communities that would give essence to quality ECCE. A preschool that is embedded within the community set up is less costly in terms of design and conduct, more accessible to the greater majority, more relevant and useful to the children and to the nation, more able to mobilize community resources, and ensure its sustainability in the long run (Serpell 2009).

- When culturally relevant connections are absent, there would be learning challenges leading to absenteeism, failure in the learning process, and disinterestedness in schooling (Awopegba, duolowu, &Nsamenang (2013).
- In-door and outdoor ECCE environment with local resources are costing almost nothing compared to technological games. Long standing African games are still as exciting and full of fun as these games and can even be more useful if age appropriate modifications are made as well as creativity is built into them.
- The traditional African setting provides a rich environment that can be creatively designed to ensure that it is child friendly. The natural outdoor environment provides shady trees, rocky sites where children enjoy stories.
- ECCE delivery and communication need to be the child's first language because if children are allowed to follow a natural process of language acquisition, a solid foundation is laid down for their first learning (Schroeder, 2007). Mother tongue education in the formative years doesn't hinder or delay acquisition of a second language; rather it facilitates it. A curriculum which allows this natural process to continue has proven to bring tremendous gains to the other academic disciplines as well (Collier and Thomas, 2004).
- A generative curriculum approach that blend's a child's experience at home and what they experience at school or in their learning centers using the language of communication best understood by both the teachers and learners would help to ensuring fruitful and effective learning. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), it is a pedagogy that uses culture as vehicle for learning, respects and

- uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice.
- An important part of the indigenization process is the use of social and cultural tools and resources that pervade the African continent. In most African societies, cultural games and plays form an important part of the indigenous education which was a life-long process of learning and acquiring knowledge. For example, Mtonga (2012) has analyzed and interpreted the indigenous Chewa and Tumbuka texts of more than 100 different children's songs and games observed in the 1980s in Zambia and illustrated how these games help children to think, intellectualize or discuss their own activities, explore the world around them, and provide responsibility training and general socialization.
  - The agentive strategies for exploiting these indigenous African craft and art work are more evident within the African family traditions and peer cultures than in the school or formal institutional education (Nsamenang, 2011). The peer group, or child-to-child socialization in particular, is a trigger and central support of "agency" in African children and needs to take ample space indigenizing ECCE in Africa. Furthermore, research has shown that the elders of rural communities often hold social capital that is made available to children through the community's indigenous socialization practices, and that this social capital can be mobilized as a resource for effective and relevant education by recruiting participation in school activities by grandparents of the children enrolled and other community elders (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Moll et al 1992). Considering grandmothers to contribute to ECCE programs through activities such as story-telling would be a potentially valuable addition to the portfolio of intervention strategies for the promotion of ECCE in rural African communities, that could help to strengthen the connections between young children's home and school environments, and to build the confidence of those communities in the local cultural relevance of the services offered by NGOs.

## Methods

**Approach:** The two approaches to indigenization are employed in an integrated manner. Indigenization follows either from within (called emic approach or bottom-up practice) or without (called an etic approach or top-bottom practice) (Enriquez, 1993) in which existing ECCE theories, concepts, and methods are modified to fit them into local cultural context (Indigenization from Without) or developed internally so that local information becomes a primary source (Enriquez, 1993) in ECCE theorizing and practice (Indigenization from Within).

**Design:** Basically conceived within the framework of the exploratory-case study variant of the qualitative research design, this study attempted to bring to light indigenization concerns in the conception, design, and implementation of ECCE in Ethiopia.

**Data sources:** In pursuit of its goal, both secondary and primary sources were employed in an integrated manner to secure, present, and discuss relevant data. Secondary sources encompass relevant research done with implications for indigenization, a brief review of documents including ECCE policy, curriculum and the standard to see the extent to which attempts are made to give consideration to indigenous ECCE practices.

Primary data were collected from three semi-rural or semi-urban NGO sponsored ECCE centers with a belief that such centers would feature both the rural as well as urban settings of Ethiopian ECCE centers at a lower scale. Two of these centers (Selam Fire and Tigwuha ECCE centres) were located in Lay Armachiho Woreda of the Amhara Regional State and the third one ("Feche Preschool") was located in Klinto Woreda of the Oromia Regional State. Selam Fire and Tigwuha were among the ten other centres established by Save the Children in the woreda as part of the education quality improvement program in the Amhara and other regions. While Selam Fire is attached to a

primary school, Tigwuha is established within the community unattached to a preschool.

As a suburb of Addis Ababa, Feche Preschool is nearly 20 KMs east to it and located within the catchment areas of three agrarian villages in Klinto woreda: Koye, Feche and Tulumute. It was one of the five preschools established in 2013 as part of the community development project under implementation by Plan International and Ratson.

Children (orphans and non-orphans, boys and girls), guardians (parents and grandparents), facilitators (all females), and administrative personnel (ECCE heads, ECCE focal persons in education offices, directors, and supervisors) were employed as participants; a total of 40 interviewees. The participants were interviewed about the various aspects of the ECCE practices keeping the conversation more focused on the relevance of the roles of each of these participants in ECCE.

To begin with children, 10 of them were interviewed; some live with both parents while others are either full or single orphans; both boys and girls were represented; and their age ranged from 5 to 7 years. The interview was made individually and in an age-appropriate way. Children were very active and expressive. In fact, some distortions were noted when it comes to factual information. For example, when asked about the number of their siblings, some gave information that was not similar with their guardians. The interviewer noted this “The child stated that she has four brothers and three sisters, but has none of these according to information from parents” (5 years old girl child, Living with both parents). In the same way, “The child stated that he has four sisters and one brother. But, information obtained from his parents revealed that he has only one brother” (6 years old boy child, Living with both parents). These situations do not, however, invalidate the responses of the children because other items were content or fact-free. In fact, interviewers were impressed with the interest, verbal fluency, and memories of these rural children. The interview items generally focused on indigenous childcare and education (songs,

games, materials); daily routines of their child at home, in the playground and at school; goals, values, expectations (of being a good child, for example); relationship with careers, mentors, and partners (i.e. siblings, grandparents, and friends), views about the ECCE center the child attends and the facilitators; contribution of the ECCE center.

The second groups of participants were guardians. A total of 18 Parents and grandparents were interviewed on indigenous childcare and education; daily routines of their child at home, in the playground and at school; goals, values, interests; concerns about childcare and education; beliefs and attitudes about current practices of childcare and education; views about the ECCE center the child attends and the facilitators; contribution of the ECCE center; and their relationship with the center. The interview was for about an hour and was enriching. All recording was made with their full consent. Some hesitations were raised but they were cleared up at the beginning with the support of ECCE facilitators who, being familiar to them, gave us a hand to build trust any time concerns arise.

The third group consisted of facilitators, those professionals in the ECCE centers that assume the role of teaching and caring in one in a child-friendly and child-centered manner. A total of six female facilitators were interviewed; in fact, all facilitators in the ECCE centers were females. These facilitators were interviewed nearly for an hour about children's participation, interest; how individual differences unfold themselves and children with special needs; guardians' participation; views about the ECCE center; situation of children in the community; how local or indigenous are the ECCE implementation.

Administrative personnel consisted of the fourth and the last group. These were participants selected from individuals assuming different administrative responsibilities regarding ECCE in the two sites: Six such individuals were considered that are grouped into three categories: ECCE Project Coordinator, ECCE Head and Focal persons, Directors and 2 Supervisors. These interviewees were asked

about basic information about the ECCE center-related project implemented; role of the organization in the process; views about the ECCE centers; design and implementation of a community- inclusive project. They were also contacted so many times to give researchers the context of the projects, used to connect interviewers with the study sites, and also provided important insights about ECCE in the area.

**Procedures:** The process of primary data collection went through two important phases. In the first phase, the lead researcher and his associate paid visits to the two study sites that were located far from the centre. Contacting the Head of the regional ECCE project, the researchers learned about ECCE developments in the region and the involvement of the sponsoring NGO in this region. Explaining the purpose of their project, the researchers then solicited for NGO's consent as well as support in data collection. Securing the most welcoming and supportive spirit from regional ECCE head of the sponsoring NGO, they proceeded on to identifying, with the support of the Head. One of the two centers considered as a sample was government school- attached and the other one was a non-attached ECCE centre. Then making prior arrangements with Woreda ECCE focal persons and ECCE supervisors/ directors in the two sites through telephone, the regional Head of ECCE centre has again escorted the researchers with a vehicle from sponsoring NGO to the two ECCE sites for a physical visit. Discussions with these personnel and facilitators, classroom and outside classroom observations were conducted. However, the children were not met in the classrooms because the centers were closed for summer vacation.

The researchers were then able to recruit two assistants to work as interviewers. These two assistants were given the interview guide to thoroughly review it and appear for a discussion. Days later, discussion was held to check the relevance, level, and clarity of the items. Adjustments were made based on the discussions. It was also decided to begin with centre 1 and then continue with the rest by successively making adjustments based on feedback obtained from prior

administrations. Accordingly, data collection in centre 3 (interviewer was again an MA graduate in developmental psychology) occurred at last; but it was better informed from the preceding two data collection sites.

**Analysis:** The interviewers were required to take notes of the interview through writing, video recording, and snap shooting (with a still camera); of course with the consent of the interviewees. The recording created little difference in the behavior of the participants even among the children; except for initial distractions of attention that subsided shortly. No discomfort was noted among adult interviewees about recordings once they consented for the interview. Interviewers were also expected to make general observations of the classroom and outside classroom conditions of the ECCE centers. They were still required to take their own personal memos of outstanding experiences and their reflections on the whole process of data collection.

Data transcription proceeded simultaneously with data collection. These transcribed data took about 60 pages. These transcribed voluminous data were translated in to English. The transcription was read and reread along with the research objectives and identification of major themes was, therefore, a synthesis of both apriori and posterior methods. The expected and theoretical themes derived from review of literature on ECCE in Ethiopia as well as the specific research objectives (apriori), on the one hand, and the major themes that emerged from reading and re-reading of the transcribed data (posetriori) were identified, regrouped, and further thematized. These themes were then integrated with related literature and discussed together in some cases augmented with direct quotes from relevant sources and participants acknowledging the data sources in parenthesis. Generally, data presentation involved over summarization of the voluminous information so that the tree (purpose of the research) can be seen from the forest (massive data).

## Findings

**Contexts and experiences:** Many Ethiopian children undergo through a kind of upbringing that previous researchers as well as our present participants (parents and grandparents) have clearly indicated to involve instilling in children such desirable characters as sharing, helping one another, hard work (little play), obedience, shouldering responsibilities and knowing obligations (than knowing rights) etc. Disciplining was highly valued by the participants so as to enable children develop these desirable behaviors and grow them into responsible adults. There was much use of physical punishment to correct misbehaviors and blessing (or 'Mirikat') to strengthen desirable behaviors. In fact, 'Mirikat' has even a much bigger presence for shaping children than physical punishment. The spiritual and social implications of 'Mirikat' are so salient that even adult children behave to please their parents and get parental 'Mirikat' or blessings and avoid 'curse' or 'Ergiman'. While 'Mirikat' is commonly employed to approve and encourage desirable behavior, 'Ergiman' is sparingly used and only for serious mishaps. The consequences of physical punishment are considered more conspicuous than 'Ergiman'. In fact, 'Mirikat' and 'Ergiman' are so subtle that neither parents nor professionals have recognized them as important instruments for building character among children in Ethiopia. The two techniques can be considered as forms of verbal rewards and punishments but unlike other forms of rewards and punishments, parents and elders are the ones destined to have the moral, spiritual, and cultural authority to practice them to monitor children's behaviors. Children who are successful as adults are usually considered to have cherished many 'Mirikat' while those failing to be accomplished as adults are considered, among other things, to have been 'cursed' mainly by parents. Shaping children's behaviors are then expected to be the responsibilities of parents than schools while academic teaching is regarded as the responsibilities of teachers. In an extreme form, this dichotomy can be seen in a story that goes like this...A father was once heard of taking his son to school latter than the normal age. Having his son helped him in the farm for several years;

the father then felt that it could be better for his son to go to school. Then, he took his son to a nearby school, got him registered and made him start the school routine. Sometime in the middle of the semester, the father wanted to know about the progress of his son and went back to the school and managed to get and talk to the teacher. He asked the teacher how well his son was progressing thus far. Discomforted about reporting bad news to a concerned father, the teacher was confused for a while, but seemingly out of choice, he said, “your son has made little progress particularly in Arithmetic”. Having decided what to comment on latter, the father then added a way-clearing question, “what about his behavior?” The teacher replied immediately, “Oh! he is a wonderful and well-disciplined child”. Noting that this experience is a proof to his skepticism about the importance of schooling and realizing his own efforts to discipline his son, the father then commented, “You see, your teaching has failed but mine has succeeded” (cited in Belay & Mitiku, 2017).

In fact, our interviewees (Guardians) have indicated that joining ECCE centers, children are provided with opportunities that would help augmenting the foundations already laid at home. Furthermore, they have also expressed that young children still get novel exposures to learning basic literacy that is quite satisfactory for daily life and prepare them for primary school. Asked to describe their expectations from the ECCE center as well as from their children, they gave descriptions like the following:

- *learning to keep themselves clean, learning good manners, learning to get along well with people, learning table manners (feeding rites), learning to differentiate the good and the bad, observing the role models that s/he would emulate, learning not to be rowdy, learning proper feeding, and cleanliness routines*
- *attending education properly, getting good knowledge, learning academic subjects (alphabets, count numbers), mastering speaking our language, learning writing, telling a story, singing a song, learning drawing*

- *engaging in such activities as putting household materials in their proper order and places*
- *knowing his/her environment in the first place, knowing self, and keeping self-health ( i.e. avoid playing in a dirty play, avoid touching dirty things, and avoid touching sharp and rusty things) (Selam Fire “gudgnt” Supervisor).*

The expectation of a grandfather can be mentioned as a case in point:

*obey their facilitators’ instructions on ECCE assignment, keep their school uniform as cleanly as possible, and learn properly, and to directly come home after school (a 48 years old Grandfather, Klinto Center).*

However, there has been a general apostasy of the traditional values, child rearing practices and educational methods mainly with the introduction of modern preschools (Demeke, 2003). Parents and grandparents described their childhood experiences in terms of hardship and gave much preference to present-day childcare and education possibly because they were exposed to impacts of modernization that is promoted through media discourse, parent education programs that are premised on western values, and NGO advocacy work that tend to define some of the traditional or cultural socialization mechanisms (like child work, physical punishment) as harmful and discuss the importance of ‘issues of child rights’ and ‘child-friendly environments’ as opposed to the adult-centered practices of the olden times. Although much preference was noted to modern ECCEs, experiences with such centers have not been most welcoming. Research evidences indicate that access to this ECCE centers remains to be limited to urban areas, is dominated by the private sector and has a very low coverage. This urban-centered early years’ education, ECCE, is also known to have an academic focus, basically involving English as a medium of communication, and employing foreign curricula, materials, and aids. With all these problems, some researchers from USA tended to regard the quality of Ethiopian ECCE

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in private centers to be better than the rest (e.g., Hoot et al., 2004) and this is possibly out of lack of familiarity to the research setting.

**Traditional early year's education:** Ethiopia's education at large has been a fabric of the west to an extent that an educator one's lamented, "there is nothing Ethiopian in it except for the students" (cited in Belay, 2007, p.3). Considering our culture and tradition as deterrent to development (Demeke, 2007), there has been a complete abandoning of the well flourished Ethio-centric traditional system of education which was put in place for a century in favor of the so-called "modern approach" that detached Ethiopians from their precious legacies and value systems (Demeke, 2007; P.191). Modern ECCE that was initiated in Ethiopia with foreign curriculum and professionals mainly of Swedish and American Peace Corp Volunteers (MNCDSA Report, 1972) went through continuous but gradually expansion in the three regimes (Haileselassie, Derg, and EPRDF) with a similar tone of external orientation in a way sidelining traditional early years' education centers. The successive governments' seemed to uphold, define and strategize early years' education only in terms of western conceptions that obviously lack nexus to traditional centers. Even scholars tended to disregard the role and contribution of traditional centers as less useful and relevant. People on the ground would obviously prefer modern centers for their kids.

Asked if they encourage traditional early year's education (Priest and koranic schools), administrative personnel interestingly believe that they were supposed to do this but didn't do it:

*I believe that priest and koranic schools are crucial and should be encouraged to play their roles in early child care and education. They are important because children are compliant to the instructions or directions these centers help them identify. I would say that these traditional centers are our allies in early childcare and education (Director, 35 years old, female, Center 1).*

*Furthermore, with reference to the issue of encouraging use of such traditional learning centers as the Koran or the priest school, I can say that we haven't done much along this line. But we generally feel that we have made great efforts to talk to the priestly so that children could pursue their religious education side by side with such ECCE subjects as science, and math. We also did the same with the Koran school by meeting the clergy and telling them of integrating both the religious and the secular subjects in ECCE (Center 1, Supervisor).*

*We honestly haven't worked much to communicate with the priest or Koran schools and discuss issues of ECCE. I feel that this is an opportunity that we haven't worked out so far. Evidently, we note that a student of early priest or Koran education performs better in the formal school. But we regret that we haven't had any relations with these traditional schools, either by way of helping or encouraging their activities (Head for Regional ECCE Project).*

**Policy context:** Childhood education and the use of medium of instruction seem to alienate the children from their culture (Belay, 2007) and expose children to things that are not related to the artifacts of his/her culture (Alasebu, 1981). In its mission statement, the ECCE Policy holds that it will endeavor to provide a comprehensive, integrated, quality, developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive service for the holistic development of all children (MoH, MoWA, MoH, 2010a) but it hardly spelt out how this could be operationalized in its other instruments ((MoH, MoWA, MoH, 2010 b, c). Hence, although the framework may not be considered as an instrument that discourages indigenization of ECCE, it obviously can't be taken as an instrument to encourage, guide, and support such endeavors.

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**ECCE Standard:** The ECCE standard used to gauge the implementation of ECCE policy and curriculum reflect the requirements of preschools in advanced countries and hence only few preschools meet the expectations (UNESCO Cluster Office Addis Ababa, 2006, P. 11). Obviously, the standard doesn't give recognition to traditional schools. It is also our concern that the standard rather marginalizes indigenous resources because quality is defined in terms of external standards. The use of English as a medium of instruction beginning from preschools has still been a major barrier at indigenizing the ECCE program in Ethiopia (Alem, 2007; Demeke, 2007).

**ECCE curriculum:** It is shown in the preamble of the curriculum that this recent version was developed to address gaps noted in the previous material. In doing so, it attempted to ensure, among others, that the revised ECCE national curriculum now follows some basic principles embedded in effective ECCE programs. Looking into the curriculum material rather critically, we of course note that some appreciable attempts were made to organize learning by developmental domains rather than school subjects, specify contents and activities to be learned under each domain of development, include play as one pedagogical tool for activities to be learned, identify assessment procedures and tools needed for activities, and specify resources and aids required for learning... Appreciative of the consecutive measures the Ministry of Education has taken to improvise ECCE curriculum over the years, we still hope that the domain-based curriculum is not any significant organizational difference from the subject-based previous version. Developmental profile of Ethiopian children being uncharted out in the first place would make a developmental domain- based curriculum difficult to imagine let alone practice it in Ethiopia. Children's developmental tendency to see and understand the world in a holistic manner demands that we rework such subject-specific content organization to a more integrated approach where all the domains and contents are included in each encounter of the child. The need to identify relevant type of play, games, materials and equipment from local resources were supposed

to be suggested so that facilitators would do the job turning their eyes onto the specific contexts they conduct ECCE. Previous studies also cast shadows on curriculum relevance. The social and cultural relevance of curriculum to Ethiopian children is questionable (Tirussew et al., 2009; Demeke, 2007) as most private preschools use curriculum borrowed from other countries and none of the elements reflect the Ethiopian culture and tradition (Demeke, 2007); curriculum contents lacked relevance to children's environment particularly in private ECCE (Tessema, 2014). There is a need to ensure contextualization of the curricula (culturally and linguistically appropriate, accessible to children with disabilities, and in pastoral communities) guidelines and learning strategies that are being generated at the central level (Britto et al., 2012).

A number of early childhood care and education centers here in the capital and the regions especially in the urban areas claim that their programs are crafted along the Montessori approach. It is not clear to what extent the physical environment and processes in these centers are contributing to these aspects of development in a natural and orderly manner. Apart from the use of different curricula in preschools (or kindergartens), the social and cultural relevance of the curriculum and its developmental appropriateness to the target children has been a point of concern (Tirussew et al., 2009; Demeke, 2007). Most private preschools use curriculum borrowed from other countries (like India, England, and America) and none of the elements reflect the Ethiopian culture and tradition (Demeke, 2007).

Many preschools resorted to Indian and European books possibly because culturally relevant storybooks maybe unavailable in Ethiopia. Paradoxically, the classroom is far removed from modern pedagogy because practices are too often focused on teaching the children formal/ academic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic exercises, and not structured and managed to addressing the rights of the child to holistic development; psychosocial aspects of care, health and nutrition

and related other needs are not taken care of (Habtamu, 1996; Tirussew, 1979; Tirussew, 1998).

**Incorporation of local resources in the ECCE centers:**  
Administrative personnel seem to understand the importance of locally produced materials but have concerns that this is not practiced:

*With reference to how well the teaching materials that Save the Children (SC) distributes are locally produced, and how well they reflect the norms, values, and culture of the surrounding, it could be stated that there is a limitation on this (Focal Person, Woreda Deputy Representative).*

*I cannot say that the teaching materials we have been using so far are locally made/ homegrown (Focal Person, Woreda Deputy Representative).*

*We, even, have seen being dependent on teaching materials brought by SC. We are focused only on these materials. But during our sessions with the facilitators, we provide them with training on how to make use of local materials of the surrounding areas in order to greatly reduce problems related to meaningful teaching conditions. Whether teaching materials or play materials, we cannot say that these are produced locally as almost all are materials provided by SC (Focal Person, Woreda Deputy Representative).*

The views of facilitators' seem to corroborate as well as contradict these ideas mainly because they tend to reflect on specific incidents they practiced in the classroom rather than on general practices that the previous participants have noted:

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*Education is offered with play materials, and children learn their lessons being very relaxed. There are Montessori play materials, and that the children are happy with them. They are also eager to stay prepared wide awake for the next task when brought to their attention about what we did today, and what are we are going to do tomorrow (Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Center 1).*

*The learning experiences that the children get at the center reflect the mores and culture of the surrounding area. I also try my best to incorporate more of these resources as I have already taken training in this regard. The children's books and the teaching materials we use are also local and reflect the norms and culture of the surrounding area (Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Center 2).*

*The learning and play materials of the center are made from raw materials collected from the surrounding. The materials have made from papers, rugs, and hard cartons (Facilitator One, male, 20 years old, married).*

*It is difficult for me to say that the curriculum reflects the conditions, norms, and culture of the surrounding area. I feel that it is outside than these. Up until now, we don't have books that are specifically prepared for children. We teach them by arranging the alphabets. The Montessori teaching materials are not home grown materials. They are not materials that reflect the norms and culture of the surrounding area. We, therefore, side by side, see to it that children are encouraged not to forget then norms and culture of their surrounding by bringing materials made of different shapes using such local sources as mud, and other similar things. In addition, we ask them to form Amharic letters by arranging sandstones. We also encourage them to make different kinds of balls out of used clothes (Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Center 1).*

Guardians expressed the importance of teaching community values, norms, child rearing practices, and goals and that this must have been incorporated into the goals and programs of the center:

*What then can we say that the children have learnt something in the center unless the community resources are not incorporated? I think the community's values, norms, & child rearing practices have been incorporated. I also believe that they are teaching the children with these community resources. In addition, the children learn such very important values as reciprocity, cooperation, showing mutual concerns, loving one another, dining and drinking together, showing sympathy for one another, and playing and sharing the materials with peers. We readily observe the internalization of these values expressed in the children's behaviors (58 years old, father, Center 1).*

*I think children are learning the community's norms, cultural values and beliefs from the center. When they come back home, we ask our children what the facilitators have taught them during their day in the center. The children tell us that the facilitators have taught them "to eat together, to play together, and to work in group and in unison, and show love and affection for one another". On this issue, there is something that I concretely observe on the children and attest that they are really learning something important (36 years old, Father, Center 1).*

Some grandparents hesitated that this is happening:

*The norms and cultures of the past olden times are no more observed. They are destroyed. Nowadays, a new and important one has come to the fore. Yet, norms and values of the past olden times are better when the learning of good manners is the required child rearing agenda. Children of today are mostly defiant, refusing not to be obedient to parental demands. Undeniably, children are seen learning values of mutual help, cooperation, and mutual concern in their play activities. But things are not as in the past, and today children and their parents*

*are seen interacting on the basis of equality (49 years old, grandmother, Center 2).*

*I don't know much regarding the incorporation of the needed community values in the center's curriculum, and their subsequent demonstration by the center, as I do not frequently visit the place (a 70 years old Grandfather, Center 3).*

Plays and games are important learning resources in ECCE. Children's plays are quite diverse in nature. Some are cultural ('who has seen my handkerchief', hide-and-peek, Eka-Eka, *kolkole* with stones; *denbushegela*, Monday-Tuesday', hoping), others are center-based and are unlikely to occur elsewhere (slides, seesaw, swings, merry-go-round/*tinbualele* and *GechGech*), and the rest are basically teaching oriented "read books, count numbers, assemble objects, love playing while reading the alphabets, A B C D (6 years old, boy child, Lives with both parents, Center 2). While cultural plays are not integrated in the teaching process and mainly used for recreation and amusement, the rest are meant for educational purposes and all the materials are purchased and provided by NGOs like SCN.

*Even if the center can provide play materials of different forms for the children, I don't think that running solely with this is not the proper way. In fact, children should be helped not to forget the norms and culture of their surroundings through production of teaching and play materials from local resources (Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Center 1).*

Cultural plays may not require extended play materials or when they do such materials are either readily available in the environment or can be prepared by the children themselves:

*I play with dolls, toy cars, and pictures. I myself make the play materials. I have different play mates in both school and in the village. I enjoy playing with them games as chasing,*

*competitive running, and such imitative plays as baking enjera, preparing sauce (wot), and building a hut” (5 years old girl child, Living with Mother, Center 3).*

*At the center, I collect pieces of paper I see on my way and chuck them in a bin (6 years old, boy child, Lives with both parents, Center 1).*

*My play materials are those that we make and play with children of my ages (6 years old, boy child, Full orphan, Lives with mother and brother).*

*I also have such play materials as a toy car, and toy airplane, etc. I have made some of these personally and get others from a friend in my neighborhood.*

It was also noted that there are kinds of children’s plays that commonly occur in other parts of the world. But, the materials may differ from place to place and time to time. It was noted that such materials were imported from elsewhere for a play that is common in the local area:

*Earlier we used to play swings. This game is still played. We also used slides and this game is still alive. We also used to play games of sitting on a car tyre, and the like (Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Center 1).*

*It is difficult to say that there are current play materials reflecting the play materials of the past. We can say that current play materials are those that have replaced the past. The current play materials have replaced the past not because of limitation of the past materials, but because of the availability of the current play materials in improved and better forms (Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Center 1).*

ECCE still requires stories, songs, and riddles as other important learning resources. The major problem of ECCE in Ethiopia is lack of age-appropriate stories that would be integrated with teaching. There is a tendency to believe that stories are necessarily narratives of the past generation and hence little efforts are seen fabricating those culturally, developmentally, and contextually relevant stories for instructional purposes. As a result, existing stories are overused, and only represent olden and rural life that bears little meaning to current developments. Stories and picture books would have to reflect the Ethiopian multi-ethnic cultural values, morality etc. (Habtamu, 1996) as well.

These problems have created story telling gaps. In relation to this, parents and grandparents were asked to share with us stories learned in their childhood. We could hardly find such narratives from parents and grandparents. Young children, too, were asked to share the stories with us. Only three of them were able to narrate stories in full. Although many of them didn't narrate stories in full, they had made it clear that they know a story of one kind or another to share. Children mention facilitators as sources rather than parents and this seems true because parents and grandparents themselves were found unable to recall stories. According to one facilitator, they tell children the stories collected from different sources:

*We tell them stories we get from different books, or heard from our parents and grandparents. The stories I tell the children are also those we heard from the different mass media. But most are those we get from story books. As an assignment, we also tell the children to collect stories from their parents or grandparents at times. Most of the children come to class with their collected stories. But some parents shun their children's request to tell them any story (Facilitator, 30 years old, female, Center 1).*

*the songs of the children are reflections of the community values. Likewise, the stories they are told are stories collected from the elderly and availed with publication. We also use riddles in this manner (ECCE Project Coordinator, Center 3).*

*We tell them stories we ourselves heard as children and ask them to tell the stories back to us. But we also use story books that are being availed at the center (Facilitator, 35 years old, female, Center 2).*

The titles of these stories seemed to center mainly on animals, “**ox and the ape**”, “**hyena**”, and “**ape**”.

*I can tell a story of the ox and the ape. I heard it on a TV program (6 years old, girl child, Lives with both parents, Center 1).*

*My favorite story is about the hyena- or Aba Jiba Jibe. I was taught by the facilitator (6 years old, boy child, Lives with both parents, Center 1).*

*I know some stories that I learned at the center. I can start, but I can't finish all down the line (7 years old, girl child, Lives with grandparents, Center 2).*

*The story I would like to tell is about the ape and aba jubie. I learned the story from the facilitator (6 years old, boy child, Lives with both parents, Center 2).*

*We learn stories at the center. I can tell you a story of 'husband and wife', I heard from my facilitator. But I don't have any person to teach me stories at home (6 years old, girl child, Lives with mother and brother).*

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*My favorite story is 'the ape/ Totit and Aba JibaJibie. I was taught this story by my facilitator (6 years old, boy child, Full orphan, Lives with mother and brother).*

The stories that were fully narrated were also focused mainly on wild animals ("ape", "hyena", and "Lion"). Although such stories may lack diversity, they are highly relevant for rural children. They are also educative in many ways. For example, the story about the 'ape' teaches good manners: e.g. asking for permission, controlling oneself-hunger, not to revenge. The story about the hyena and two boys has again many lessons for children; that animals can't be smarter than humans, it is good to be smart than being foolish, that smart boys are smart because they are able to help others who are in problems. The story about the lion sends a very clear message to the children about the importance of expressing gratitude for services rendered to us.

As regards songs, children seem to have more songs than stories either because of rehearsal effect minimizing forgetting of the learned ones or because of more acquaintance to songs than stories. Alike stories, the sources were all reported to be the center and the facilitators. They still appear more diverse in content than stories. The songs were "Small child, Bye, Bye" teaching to care for younger siblings and others; "three dolls sleeping on the bed" common in almost all preschools and used to teach to take cares during playing, "endichendichyalechchewata" (*such and such kind of play*), "school days in a week", "my little school bag", "science", "Amharic alphabets", and "the thief man".

Riddles are basically intellectual and conversational play activities preferably fitting grown up children. Only one boy made mentioning of two riddles as follows:

*Something that you move on but never ends. (Answer: place points you pass through) (6 years old boy child, Livingwith both parents, Center 3).*

*She paints her eyes black, and appears in a market sack (answer: bean seed). I was taught these riddles by the center facilitators (6 years old boy child, Living with both parents, Center 3).*

**ECCE centers' social, cultural and physical set up:** Indigenization is not conceptually limited to the ECCE software alone. It equally applies to the ECCE hardware including the buildings and classroom set up. Preschool observation was made to check out the general layouts and features of preschool compounds, classrooms, and play grounds for possible incorporation of community resources. General impressions of observers were such that all the teaching resources and play materials are very attractive, rooms are decorated in a way to capture children's attention, chairs and tables are child-sized, and classrooms are organized to allow children's free movement and interaction among children as well as with the facilitators. Almost all the teaching and play resources were purchased and supplied by the sponsoring organizations. In fact, observers didn't encounter a single material locally prepared by the centers, facilitators, or parents. One of the observers even asked a facilitator what will happen to the center if the donors stop providing resources. Feigning to make fun out of the conversation, a facilitator replied, "we will bother about it when that happens."

It would also be of much interest to mention here the interviewers' outstanding comments of the observation as well as the interview:

- *parents and grandparents seem to have forgotten cultural stories, games, songs, proverbs and related others, and hence, these heritages were not transmitted to the children*
- *All the resources are imported; classroom and outside resources are not made from locally available materials. Almost all the resources hardly reflect local situations; were routinely prepared to reflect Montessori approach.*

- *Interviewees as well as facilitators were expecting service charges for participating in the interview. This has been a noticeable change of values in rural areas where people are normally ready to help outsiders, share their resources and time; rather than asking payment for little support rendered.*
- *Dependency feelings were noted among people in the sense that they expect all the ECCE resources, materials, and other required input to be provided by NGOs and the Government*
- *There are lesser community involvement in terms of caring for and protecting the ECCE resources, and*
- *Grandparents involvement was extremely low; even parents involvement is limited only to attending meetings.*

Guardians, facilitators, and administrative personnel were also asked to describe what it means for them to be a 'good ECCE' center. Their descriptions reflected a typical private and urban-based ECCE that is accessible only to children from the well to do families. Their descriptions gave little room for inclusion of locally available natural and human made materials, equipment, and resources. Guardians' description is particularly lengthy and generally showed that a good ECCE has adequate **financial**, **human** (*good and caring facilitators; good administrators*), **material** (*sufficient numbers of chairs and tables, outdoor and indoor play materials, toys; sufficient classroom materials and books; and service for children, potable water*), and **physical** resources (*smooth and leveled, spacious and clean compound, playground latrine and learning classroom; dining room for children, child recreation area, tea room; green, clean, and insect-free compound, good fence, and keep away older children from entry -free environment*).

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Below are some illustrative direct quotes from participants:

- *well-organized center with chairs, blackboard, outdoor play materials, snap room, toilets potable water, clean compound and competent teachers, a cleanly kept center; a plot of land, toilets, potable water, electric light, telephone, teaching materials, outdoor play materials, a fence, some inputs for teachers and school uniform for the children (a 45 years old Father, Center 3).*
- *building's adequate structure in both its internal and external edifices, proper care of the facilitators, cleanliness and outdoor play materials, teaching materials (a 50 years old Grandmother II, Center 3).*
- *Adequate light, circulation of fresh air, a wide and clean room, children's drawings on the wall, outdoor play materials and a place where children can dine out (Facilitator Two, female, 42 years old, married, family size of 3 persons with one girl child).*

**Use of local languages:** Use of foreign languages right from the early levels and the tendency to consider this experience as an important outcome of pre-school education (Belay, 2007; ESDP IV, 2010; Tirussew et al., 2009; Demeke, 2007) is commonly noted. Because parents give value to English, many urban-based private schools try to prove to parents about their quality by enabling young children speak the language like the natives; there was time in which a preschool center used to advertise itself saying “an ECCE establishment where children speak English like a diplomat.” Many parents, who send their kids to expensive private preschools, proudly talk about their children's brilliance citing the child's English proficiency as evidence. In fact, building proficiency in English is an asset as the medium of instruction in the latter grades is English. But, using it as a sole measure of quality schooling and discouraging children from using local languages both at home and in schools is nothing other than doing harm on the development of the thought processes of the children.

There is in fact an encouraging beginning in the use of local languages in the different regions of the country mainly justified by the language policy. There is, however, a lack of trained teachers and teaching materials in these languages (Alem, 2007). In the centers visited, and possibly in all other rural settings, there is use of the local language (i.e. Amharic) with in the classrooms of the centers. This could be an advantage compared to ECCE centers in the towns where much preference is given and attempts are made to use English from these early levels.

### **Discussion**

Indigenizing education and care in general and ECCE in particular is neither an option nor a luxury that can be postponed. Despite the undue politicization of the exercise that it would block development of internationalism and unity in an era of globalization, it remains obvious that one can't globalize before getting indigenized. Indigenous profiles are springboards to develop stamina for properly navigating through the ocean of globalization. Hence, indigenization builds our capacity to be able to survive amidst globalization rather than melting in it and ultimately vanishing. Analysis of data in our present paper seems to suggest, as the case is in many African educational practices, that ECCE has not been a platform for science and culture to inform one another and serve the best interest of children.

This Ethiopian case seems to replicate the broader African scenario. It is commonly said that indigenization of ECCE that would otherwise benefit children from local treasures remains hidden in Africa due to neglect as a result of external influence (Opta, 1998; Zulu, 2006). In this regard, Serpell (2009) reviewed a series of programmatic inquiries conducted in Zambia between 1971 and 2009 and outlined some principles of good practice that appear to have been largely neglected (and, in some cases, deliberately violated) by current ECCE programs for children of African communities as use of an indigenous language familiar to the enrolled young children, use of indigenous social and

cultural resources, and inclusion of children with moderate and/or severe developmental difficulties. More specifically, Matafwali (2008) conducted a survey of six ECCE programs offered by NGOs in rural Zambian communities spread across four provinces and found out that while the quality of education offered varied across the sites, it was noted that not one of them incorporated either an indigenous language familiar to the enrolled young children or an indigenous cultural games familiar to local adult family members/caregivers.

Reflecting on this anomaly, we can generally understand that the inspiration for ECCE programs in almost all African countries has come from societies outside the continent, primarily those known variously as “the West”, “the global North”, or the “industrialized world”. African countries embraced the foreign models that were introduced to promote modernization; to the neglect of indigenous education system (Akinbote, 2006) that was implicitly considered by both Africans and non-Africans as being non-modernized, uncivilized, traditional, and, therefore, non-useful.

It should, however, be noted that the practices of ECCE in those foreign societies have a history that is deeply embedded in their own philosophies, tradition and culture and their design reflects both scientifically validated and conventionally accepted assumptions about child development and the best ways of promoting, supporting and nurturing its achievement of socially agreed goals of their own rather than that of African. Propagating and infusing western views into the African educational system in the name of modernization is then simply westernizing Africa and ultimately sidelining local practices and uprooting Africa from its roots. Culturally alien foreign practices and strategies overlook the socially agreed goals of child rearing in African communities and, hence, to introduce them as exact “nominally equivalent” replicas is liable to be incomprehensible and/or offensive to the African parents and caregivers of the children enrolled; thus fomenting a process of alienation for the children between the demands of their everyday family lives and the ECCE center

curriculum. This in a way is a form of perpetuating African oppression, its underdevelopment, and deprivation. Education needs to be a royal road to and weaponry for liberty, development and self-sustenance rather than a tool for subjugating the grassroots.

We are, therefore, of the opinion that when foreign ECCE practice is considered for adoption for African/ Ethiopian children, the design should carefully consider the question of whether the goals towards which the practice is aimed are consistent with the local community's cultural values. It should also consider whether the function envisaged for the practice in its context of origin will be well served by introducing a nominally equivalent replica in the current, African context, or whether a nominally different practice may serve that function better in this context. In the event that the two contexts are critically in disarray, the bottom up approach of ECCE indigenization (creation) appears to yield a comprehensible and more serviceable ECCE program. Whether a top-down "adoption" approach, or a bottom-up "creation" strategy, or even a blend of both, ECCE program, as a foundation period for later learning and development, can't afford to be irrelevant for Ethiopian children. Then, before anything else, even long before redressing "access" (i.e. the 'mumps'), the 'goiter' needs to be surgically removed; for no access is better than wrong access.

### **Conclusions**

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. In relation to this issue, the central theme in our present research was to examine the extent to which the design and conduct of the target ECCEs were indigenized along different issues: physical set ups, perceived qualities of good ECCE centers and facilitators, use of local languages, incorporation of locally produced materials, attitudes of different groups, plays, games, stories, songs, and riddles, and situation of child-to-child support.

In fact, next to the problem of access, indigenization of ECCE seems to be an important concern in Ethiopia. However, it has not been seriously captured as a major concern in policy making as well as previous research. We would say that even the policy and program documents were at best silent on this need of indigenization or at worst implicitly discourage indigenization. The best example is actually the ECCE guideline set forth to ensure the minimum standard ECCE has to fulfill at establishments or before they proclaim to launch their services. It is not only that the minimum expectations are unrealistic by Ethiopian standards but also fail to include relevance ratings in the criteria. Furthermore, the criteria don't fit for checking inclusion of locally made resources, if in case centers aspire to do so. The kind of ECCE that is envisaged in the standard is like a typical European ECCE. In fact, it was surprising that even parents description of the qualities of good ECCEs is by far similar to those mentioned in the standard suggesting that parental expectation, too, has already been shaped by external standards. The curriculum materials and other documents also seem to pay little value, if any, to such exercises.

As regards practices on the ground, use of the local languages with in the classrooms is much better in rural areas than the ECCEs in towns where English appears dominating. The physical set ups observed in the visited centers is such that almost all the resources including the chairs and play materials were donations from the supporting organizations possibly purchased from elsewhere; there are no materials produced locally. In fact, Plan International and Save the Children have tried to compile local story books and this is an important step in the indigenization process. This exercise and the training provided on preparation of local resources, seems to at least create an understanding among facilitators about the importance of indigenizing resources and at most encouraged some facilitators even to think further to collecting their own stories from parents of the children they teach and also preparing some play materials themselves. In fact, some of the identified songs, stories, and games are local and also reflect the realities of rural Ethiopia. But, they are limited in scope and

diversity. Use of games and plays for academic purposes seems limited and need to be expanded. In fact, use of stories is by far limited. Parents and grandparents were not also able to provide stories they learned in childhood. Perhaps, narrating stories may not be a common cultural practice in the survey areas. Yet, it is possible to fabricate a number of culturally relevant stories for teaching purposes. In the same way, more academically relevant games and play activities can be created for ECCE purposes.

We would generally say that there needs to be a concern about the need for indigenization as much as concerns have been commonly voiced by different stakeholders about quality and access issues of ECCE in Ethiopia.

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