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Context Situation of Pre-service Preprimary Teacher Education in Selected Colleges in Ethiopia: Input-Process-Outcome Approach

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Abstract

Pre-primary teacher education institutions are mandated to advancing professional competencies among personnel working with young children. The objective of this research was to examine the situation of the existing pre-primary teacher preparation programs of the colleges in Ethiopia including their contributions and impacts on the trainees. Guided by the mixed research design (qualitative and quantitative approaches), data were collected using questionnaire, interview and FGD concurrently. Data sources consisted of a total of 10 trainers, 3 department heads, and 66 trainees from three purposefully selected teacher education colleges in Ethiopia. Results have indicated that both the design and delivery of the current pre-primary teacher education had serious gaps and would not promise producing competent graduates as evidenced by students' knowledge, attitude, and self-efficacy. Six major recommendations have been given to reverse course including, among others, the need to work towards the professionalization of the field of preschool education at all levels.

Keywords: *Preschool, ECCE, preprimary school, teacher education in Ethiopia, curriculum, ECCE pedagogy*

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Introduction

Teachers are the most valuable human resources that a nation can count on in nurturing for the young (Wafa et al., 2003). Their roles and impacts on students' learning appear to make huge differences in educational success than many other variables (Darling-Hammond, 2007) and these differences are sustained and cumulative (Lieberman & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Teacher education has always been a crucial and symbolically significant field in quality education development particularly in the early grade (Martinez-Beck & Zaslow, 2006). Quality teacher preparation is known to be symbolically significant in the early grades (Martinez-Beck &Zaslow, 2006). It is an important determinant of teacher success (Bacharach et al., 2010) and teacher retention (Latham et al., 2015). It is also unequivocally instrumental for building competencies that ensure positive staff-child interactions (Martinez-Beck & Zaslow, 2006) and higher quality developmental and educational services to young children. Research indicates that it is a robust predictor of children's quality interactions with teachers, peers, learning materials, and environmental features supporting those interactions (Buysse et al., 1999, cited in MoE, 2018). This in turn has a positive impact on child outcomes (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006), in the short- and long-term (Kontos & Wilcox – Herzog, 1997), including the greatest influence on achievement (Wilson et al., 2001), emerging literacy and numeracy skills, as well as better behavioral and social skills in early childhood settings.

Such positive impact of early child development and education professionals capitalizes, to a large extent, on preprimary teacher educators' possession of the required core professional competencies. 'Competency' encompasses a set of cognitive

knowledge, demonstrable affective (dispositions, characteristics, values) attributes, and behavioral skills that enable and improve efficiency and effectiveness of professional performance (Center for ECCE, Addis Ababa University, 2023). In the context of preprimary education, competencies are seen as crucial to achieving the desired outcomes of holistic child development and learning as they consist of a combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and personal attributes that contribute to enhanced success in specific performance areas (UNESCO, 2018).

A competent person appears to possess a series of knowledge, capacities, skills and personal qualities that contribute to their personal and professional performance and enable them to thrive in the job environment (Inter-American Dialogue, 2021). Based on a synthesis of four most notable Preprimary Teacher Competency frameworks widely sampled from three different regions of the globe[5] as well as local contextual practices, preprimary teacher education competencies in Ethiopia may be taken to fall into four broad competency domains (Center for ECCE, Addis Ababa University, 2023). These four broad domains of competencies are (1) child development and learning (content knowledge, pedagogic practice, and assessment); (2) the learning environment and resources; (3) stakeholder engagement and collaboration; and (4) PPE teacher professional development. The preprimary teacher competency then involves

[5]These four competency frameworks include "Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Teacher Competency Framework for Pacific Small Island Developing States" (UNESCO, 2018), the "Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators" in North America proposed by the American National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC (2019), and the EU recommendations on Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (Urban et al., 2012).

requisite knowledge in child development and pedagogy, methodological skill sets that help translating the knowledge base into an effective interaction with children and parents and dispositions that sets out commitment, passion and sense of responsibility of teachers (Katz, 1992, 1995; Harvard Family Research Project, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009). Deeper understandings of child development and early education issues enable teachers to provide richer services for all children (including those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged), to engage children of varying abilities and backgrounds, to connect with a diverse array of families, and to do so with greater sense of accountability and fewer resources (Sheridan et al., 2009). The core knowledge base, skill sets and attitudes also promote children learning by creating and managing effective learning environments (physical space, materials, activities, and classroom management), working with diverse populations of children, integration and cohesiveness by using indigenous knowledge, values and skills in educating children, and developing and using partnerships to continuously improve quality of practice.

Preprimary school preparation in Ethiopia needs to be examined in terms of its promises and delivery of teacher profiles that ensure quality learning and development outcomes of the type mentioned above. In fact, this program has a short presence in Ethiopia. While the European-based preschool education was initiated in the 1960s in the country with expatriate teaching staff running the program, the need to sustain the program by training the local staff was initiated nearly a decade later. The Menen Preschool Teacher Training program, established in 1979/80 with support from UNICEF, was the first known training institute initiated for this purpose (Tirussew et al., 2009). Despite being the only institute of its kind in Ethiopia, it did not flourish as expected because of limited demand for the service, lack of technical support and

logistics, and absence of clear roadmap for expansion of the service. The center was later transferred to the then Kotebe College of Teacher Education (now renamed as 'Kotebe University of Education'), where it is currently based to offer a diploma program in ECCE training under a different nomenclature (Department of ECCE). Recently, other colleges and universities in Ethiopia have also been showing interest in teaching preschool teachers and educators. As a result, the regional colleges in the country have already launched preschool teacher training programs at the Diploma level. In addition, some universities have also initiated ECCE training with bachelor's and master's degrees. For example, Addis Ababa University initiated the first doctoral program in the country a couple years ago.

There is no doubt then that ECCE professionalization is taking shape in Ethiopia, with increasing visibility, particularly in the last couple of decades. However, the teacher training component is in the process of development, with the curricula and modalities changing and re-changing; therefore, it is a field in search of identity. As a result, research evidence indicates that the Ethiopian teacher education system in general (MoE, 2002) [6] and the preprimary teacher education program in particular (MoE, 2022) are incarcerated with several challenges. Available institutional (e.g. Tirussew, Teka, Belay, Belay and Demeke, 2009; MoE, 2016; Tirussew, Amare, Jeilu, Tassew, Aklilu & Berhannu, 2018; MoE, 2022) as well as individual (e.g. Yayeh, 2017) research investigations suggest that serious challenges characterize the preschool teacher education program in Ethiopia. Of prime concern is that the need for a well-thought out national preschool teacher education programming has fallen into the blind

[6] For example, the contexts related to a study conducted in 2002 on the "Quality and Effectiveness of Teacher Education in Ethiopia" that led to the establishment of a Teacher Education System Overhaul.

spot of the MoE until 2014[7] and has even suffered from problems of implementation thereafter[8]. While this research evidence in itself contributes a lot to our understanding of the status of preprimary education in the country, such efforts are, however, piecemeal, not comprehensive, tangentially addressing the issue; therefore, they would contribute minimally in suggesting strategic interventions to overhaul the training system in the country. Therefore, this study aimed to address this gap.

The framework selected for this study was fundamentally informed by the IRC evaluation framework and complemented by a synthesis of the OECD model, the context-input-process-product (CIPP) model originally developed by Daniel Stufflebeam and associates in the 1960s, and successively contextualized in different settings (Stufflebeam, 2003) including Ethiopia, and the program evaluation model developed by some of the present consultants, incorporating the CIPP model. Hence, our present approach purports to provide a comprehensive framework focusing on four components (Design, Input, Process, and Outcome) of the program where we contextualized these four components to represent the preparedness (design and input), delivery (process), and achievement (outcome) of the program.

[7]The first well thought national teacher curriculum development was noted. See MoE (2014). Curriculum Framework for Primary Pre-service Teacher Education (Unpublished).

[8]See for example, MoE. (2016). Evaluating Teacher Training Practices in Ethiopia across Modalities: Focus on Primary and Pre-Primary Pre-service Program. Addis Ababa: Report Submitted to MoE; MoE (2016). Ethiopian Education Roadmap Development Process, 2017-2030: Preprimary and Primary Education: Addis Ababa: MoE; Yigzaw, H. (2015). Early Childhood Care and Education in Sedentary and Agro-pastoral Societies: What is Practiced and Being Integrated: Proceeding of the First National Conference on Pastoral Education: ECCE. Jigjiga University: Ethiopia.

These interlocking systems of education that equally apply for preprimary teacher preparation in Ethiopian colleges can be briefly described based on previous local research (Somali Region Education Sector Analysis, 2022).The descriptions emphasize resources that are available for implementing educational programs and plans, the level of implementation and performance of these programs and plans, and how far the educational objectives were sufficiently realized among the targeted learners.

Input: Inputs are the actual resources that are put at the disposal of educational provision including financial provisions to the education sector, college facilities and materials, teaching aids within the classroom and outside (like libraries and laboratories), college personnel (directors, teachers, and support staff) and related others.

Process: This involves assessing how the program is being implemented, such as teaching-learning activities done, monitoring how these activities are performing, auditing the program to make sure it is following required legal and ethical guidelines, and identifying defects in the procedural design or in the implementation of the program.

Product: This includes the general and specific outcomes of the educational program that include measuring anticipated learning outcomes in students, attempting to identify unanticipated outcomes, assessing the merit of the program, conducting a retrospective benefit/cost assessment, and/or conducting a cost effectiveness assessment.

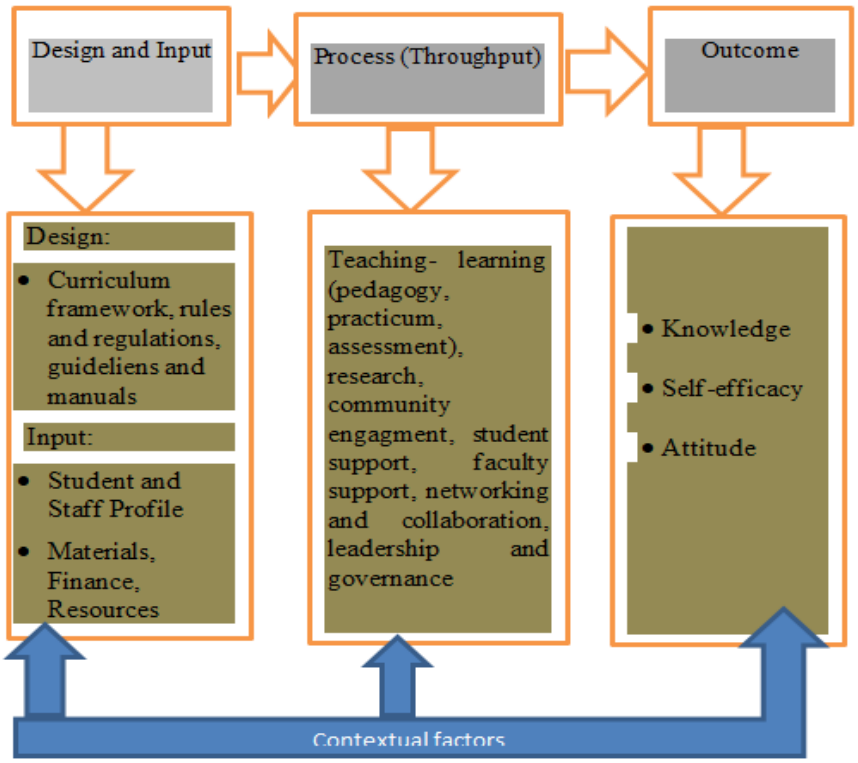

Figure 1: Framework of the Research Showing Processes and Components of Preprimary Education Assessment

In the light of all these considerations, this study aimed to examine the preparedness, delivery, and outcomes of the preprimary teacher education in selected colleges, employing the following indicators: relevance, coherence and collaboration, and perceived impact.

Relevance refers to the extent to which the modalities used in the training program (direct and indirect implementation) foster early childhood care and education. It includes activities, products, or outputs are suited to the needs, priorities, and policies of the target group; whether the expected activities and outputs are consistent with the

overall goal and the attainment of its objectives. Questions like 'Is the training program relevant to the needs of children and local context in Ethiopia?' Effectiveness refers to the extent to which processes and efforts are functioning the way they are intended? Are the designs, inputs, processes and results obtained of high quality?

Coherence and Collaboration refer to the extent to which program components are compatible to one another (internal coherence) and with other interventions in a country, sector (e.g. the preschool education programs), or institution (external coherence) and the extent to which the implementation of the program entertains collaborations among stakeholders. For example, preprimary teacher education program is said to be coherent in terms of organizing all of its course work along with set goals, as well as practical experiences, around that vision not just a random assortment of courses and experiences for people, the courses are very much connected to practice as well as to theory (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Perceived Impact refers to the perceived positive and negative changes produced by an intervention, whether directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. The training program is intended to address the professional needs of trainees. Assessing perceived impact involves, for example, answering questions like 'How do trainees perceive the difference the implementation of the training program has made to them? Sustainability refers to whether perceived impacts or the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after training. When evaluating the sustainability of program impacts, we need to consider questions like 'To what extent do the benefits of the training program continue after graduation?'

The purpose of this study was to investigate the design, delivery, and outcomes of the existing preprimary teacher education program in selected colleges in Ethiopia, focusing on the following research questions:

1) How do college educators view the preprimary teacher education curriculum?
2) What program inputs were put in place in the preprimary school teacher education program?
3) What implementation practices characterized the system?
4) What competencies were observed in the preprimary school teacher trainees?

Research Methodology

Design

The objective of this research was to assess the situation of preprimary school teacher education program in Ethiopia from the point of view of the context, input, process, and outcome. The study uses the (concurrent) mixed methods research design in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and analyzed to compare, support, or triangulate the data. This is mainly because, as many scholars in the field believe (e.g., Creswell, 2009), using the two methods benefits the evaluation from the detailed and deeper nature of qualitative data and the wider and generalizable nature of quantitative data. The strengths of one method often offset the weaknesses of the other.

Participants of the Study

Participants of this study were drawn from colleges of teachers' education (CTEs) in Ethiopia. CTEs are educational institutions aiming at equipping prospective teachers with the required requisite knowledge, attitude, and skills for work as a teacher from preprimary to secondary schools. There were 39 teacher education colleges with the greater majority (22 of them) were from Oromia and Amhara regions. They provided a three year diploma-level education in teaching through regular, summer, and evening extension modalities (EMIS, 2022/23, p.83). There was at least one teacher education college in these administrative areas. Each of the regions, emerging regions, and city administrations were represented by one teacher education college. In the sampled institutions, focus was on pre-service preschool teacher training at the diploma level. There were about 24 preschool teacher educators in the three colleges and all available preschool teacher trainers (N = 24) were taken. Among the three deans, two deans (N=2) and from the three department heads/ coordinators, three (N=3) heads were involved in the study. All graduating class teacher trainees from the three colleges (N=66) were participants of the study.

Data Collection Tools

Questionnaire, interview and FGD were employed to collect data from participants of the study. The questionnaire was self-developed based on the literature and previous works. The questionnaire was used to assess preschool teacher trainees' self-efficacy and knowledge about and attitude towards preschool education as a professional practice. It consisted of a total of 35 items such that 14 were forced-choice (wrong or right) items for measuring knowledge, 9 items with five-point rating scale

for attitude, and the remaining 12 were items with four level options for self-efficacy. The possible minimum and maximum scores were 0 to 14, 9 to 45 and 12 to 48, respectively.

The interview guide was employed to collect data from teacher educators and department heads on perceived effectiveness of the preschool teacher training program, curriculum of the program, qualification and professional development of trainers, relevance of the curriculum content, pedagogy, resources, assessment and governance and leadership. Focus Group Discussions were held with students about the relevance of the curriculum, the pedagogy, practicum, resources, etc. There was one discussion group in each college.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained through the questionnaire were entered into SPSS; the data were then cleaned and analyzed. The analysis was made using descriptive statistics such as mean and percentage. The qualitative data analysis passed the following stages as data transcription, coding, categorizations and thematization. The recorded interviews and FGDs were transcribed by the researchers. After the transcriptions were done, coding was carried out. Based on the identified codes, the themes were identified.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted with the consent of the research participants. During the data collection, each participant was briefed about the purpose of the study, and all gave oral consent.

Results

This result section is presented in four segments. It begins by depicting the background profile of the participants. The second part synoptically presents the input and related contextual factors (i.e. curriculum material, trainees' entry behavior and selection context, faculty profile, resources, and modules used) affecting the preprimary teacher education preparation in the sampled colleges. The third part presents the educative process, including pedagogical practices, students' practicum work, assessment issues, and leadership and governance practices. The last part presents the perceived impacts of the training on students (in terms of knowledge, attitude and self-efficacy on the job to come).

1. Profile of Sample Participants

Profile of the Sample Trainers

A total of 10 trainers and 3 department heads were sampled from the three institutions. As indicated in Table 1, only three were females and ten were males. Conversely, there were three male and ten female trainees. All of them were MA holders (two were PhD candidates). Among these, about 69% specialized in early childhood education (n=4) and psychology (n=5). Their age (minimum = 31, maximum = 53, mean = 40 years) and service year (minimum = 4, maximum = 29, mean = 40 years) suggest that they were not novice but relatively experienced and, therefore, can handle the responsibilities with some competence.

Table 1

Profile of Sample Preschool Teacher Trainers and Heads from Three Teacher Education Colleges in Ethiopia

College	Code	Name	Sex	Age	Qualification	Academic field	Service year
	01	Teacher 1	Male	35	PhD Candidate	EdPM	12
	02	**Chair**	Male	53	MA	Curriculum	29
	03	Teacher 2	Male	50	MA	Curriculum	26
College D	04	Teacher 3	Female	41	MA	Psychology (M&E)	
	05	Teacher 4	Male	46	MA	EdPM	
	06	Teacher 5	Male	33	MA	ECCE	
	07	Teacher 6	Male	55	MA	Psychology	
College K	08	**Chair**	Male	34	MA	Psychology (Dev.)	8
	09	Teacher 1	Male	47	MA	Psychology (Dev.)	13
	10	Teachers 2	Male	33	PhD Candidate	ECCE	4
	11	**Chair**	Male	32	MA	ECCE	5
College H	12	Teacher 1	Female	32	MA	ECCE	5
	13	Teacher 2	Female	31	MA	Psychology (Social)	7

Profile of the Sample Trainees

The profile of the sampled trainees is summarized in Table 2. A total of 66 participants were sampled of whom seven were boys and 59 were girls. They were recruited from grade 10 in the old system and grade 12 in the new system. About 34 indicated that they joined the program with choice. However, when asked why they joined the program if it was not their choice, 40 of them gave reasons suggesting that those who responded that they joined with their first choice were not doing so, but instead responded possibly for social desirability reasons. The reasons they gave appeared to us to be genuine because they met our expectations: '… until I get another

job', 'pressure from others', 'the opportunity came in…', '… I picked it', '… did not have another choice', and 'to try it and change later'.

Table 2

Background of Trainees before and after Admission to Colleges

Variables	**Categories**	**College D**	**College H**	**College K**	**Total**
Age (mean)		21.92	21.34	23.26	22.138
Entrance Result Grade 10 (mean)		2.60	2.30	2.395	2.4143
National Exam (12th Grade) Result (mean)		329.92	276.07	336.0	313.9
College GPA (mean)		2.58	2.62	2.48	2.56
Sex	Male	0	3	4	7
	Female	13	26	20	59
Grade level before joining the college	10	1	1	21	23
	12	12	28	2	42
Was preschool program your first choice?	Yes	9	24	1	34
	No	2	3	1	6
	Not sure	2	0	2	4
If not your first choice, why did you join?	Until I get another job				3
	Others' pressure				1
	Not to lose the opportunity				4
	I had no other choice and I was hopeless				8
	Just to try it and change it later				19
	Other				5
	Total				40

The mean national exam results for grades 10 (2.4/4.0) and 12 (314/700) and, surprisingly, the college GPA (2.56/4.00) were consistently the lowest. This confirms

that the college training did not improve trainees' academic standing but rather reproduces statuesque. These GPAs also confirm the established belief in Ethiopia that only students with borderline GPAs joined the teaching profession

2. Inputs and Contexts

Curriculum

Curriculum is a roadmap and blueprint for providing holistic services that are planned to be delivered to children. An effective preprimary teacher education curriculum needs to establish itself on principles that the curriculum needs to: be based on the philosophy that supports holistic child development, apply child appropriate pedagogy, ensure professional identity and commitment, link the ECCE program with the preschool centers and community settings, promote cultural values and beliefs, use children's capability and experiences, reflect developmentally appropriate practice, and ensure parental involvement in child learning and support (MoE, 2018).

Along with these principles, the curriculum for preprimary teacher education program needs to be flexible to build knowledge and skills about the developmental needs of children so that the trainee would be able to promote physical, cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic and aesthetic development of children up to 8 years of age. Other content areas that may need to be included are resource mobilization and management, use of community resources (both human and material), enlisting community participation, building relationships with parents and establishing collaborative and cooperative links with ECCE and other agencies.

Awareness about local environment and natural surroundings, community dynamics, national and local customs, fairs and festivals and community mode of social living, appreciation of places of historical and cultural significance are all necessities. The diploma program for preschool teacher preparation, which was developed in 2014 consisted of 42 courses that were grouped into bridge, common and profession courses. In a document that claims to be a revised curriculum developed in 2018 (but not implemented), it was indicated that this curriculum that was under implementation then was described as unable to address vertical and horizontal links and holistic child development. More a focus was given to few domains such as literacy and numeracy over other domains. Further, it lacks developmental and cultural appropriate practices that were considered to have shown lack of standardization (expressed in terms of teachers' profile, indoor and outdoor materials etc.). Contents prepared for six years and above were offered for three years, four years and five years. While sharing their views about the effectiveness of this training program, participants took lengthy time elaborating on the profile of this curriculum.

The discussions that are synoptically presented below generally underscore that that curriculum had lots of drawbacks that needed to be rectified before taking any other substantive measure of improving the preservice teacher preparation in this country. The reflections of participants on the preschool teacher preparation curriculum were critical; fundamentally revealing how inadequate the training curriculum is in so many ways; except for an interviewee who endorses that the curriculum is relevant, "... I have taught trainees Child Play, Material Production and Curriculum and they are adequate for them. As long as it is a new program, it is enough…" (D03***)***. The remaining all underscored how the curriculum was ineffective:

> *should be redesigned (D04), hinders producing effective teachers (K08), unable to produce qualified preschool teachers (H12), and lacks relevance as many were quoted to say: Only limited courses are relevant to the profession (D01); fails to reflect children's developmental, creative and play needs (D02); does not seem to include international experiences as well as the realities and needs of the community (H11), lacks relevance, contents staffed and not practice-based (D02**),** many of the courses are irrelevant (D05) and not customized to the needs of the trainees (D06**),** over 50% of the courses not relevant to the preschool program and trainees are wasting their time to cover these courses (D06).*

Most of the critiques directed at relevance held it that the program was related more to primary rather than preprimary level: most of the courses were not relevant to preschool teachers; rather the courses were prepared to train primary school teachers (K08; D04; H11; D04; H11; D02**).** The courses were not relevant. The curriculum did not match with what trainees were supposed to do. What was given to the trainees was completely different from what they were practicing. There is a huge curriculum mismatch (D01).

Selection and Recruitment of Trainees

Although preschool teacher quality is a subject of continued controversy and is yet to be settled, a cursory inspection of literature generally stipulates that a good preschool teacher is expected to develop such qualities as patience, passion, and compassion. These qualities are personal dispositions that hardly take course during college training. Therefore, trainee selection needs to be stringent to identify candidates

with these dispositions. In this regard, attempts were made to check the seriousness of the trainee recruitment process in the sampled colleges.

Review of the responses of interviews with the participants has led to generating a new theme that was not included in the suggested interview guide. This theme that has transpired from interview responses pertains to the issue of trainee selection and placement. This analysis has revealed issues relating to recruitment guides, minimum requirements, entrance exams, profile of the applicants and trainees, parties involved and the selection and placement processes. Below are the responses organized under these categories.

Recruitment procedures

Recruitment procedures seem to vary among the three colleges. In one of the colleges, the recruitment guide is prepared by the regional education bureau every year and shared with the colleges. Once the guide is received by the college, then it organizes orientation and gives direction to techears so that the recruitment proceeds in accordance with the guidelines of the Bureau. College teachers are required to prepare entrance exams and administer them going down to the different local districts in the region where candidates are expected to be found (H11). In the other college, too, entrance exam is used but entrance exams are prepared annually by different colleges in the region in turns *(D05).* The selection in third college seems to be done without the involvement of the preschool department *(K10)*. This group expresses that one of the problems they have is that they do not have a say in the selection process:

> *Our students are selected by the Addis Ababa city administration and it is the city administration that sponsors the students. We do not have*

> *involvement in the selection process; we are not given the opportunity to see the selection guideline. It is only female applicants selected to the preschool program; even if they do not have the ability and interest to work with preschool children. It also hinders interested and qualified male candidates not to come to the program. These problems affect the quality of students who are assigned to the program (K10).*

The entrance exams used in the two colleges were critiqued for having different shortcoming: not as such able to discriminate among applicants and not challenging *(D05);* applicants' notions about the profession are not well tested; instead, it does the sorting by asking general knowledge questions orally *(H12);* written test is the same for candidates, i.e. neither the written test nor the oral question is intended for recruiting preprimary trainees alone, but is a joint entrance test for all levels intending to join the college and the same is true for grading the performances on the tests *(H12, H13).*

Profile

Two critical concerns were observed with respect to the profile of trainees. First is the tendency to feminize enrollment and the unwarranted implication of female incompetence. As per the regional directives in the two colleges, females are given the priority during admission. Within the limits of the enrollment size allocated for the year, females are likely to be admitted if they meet minimum requirements because there is a recognition that their feminine background contributes better at caring the children than males (D05; H12; H13). In the FGD conducted with five boys in their third year program, it was found that the males felt the admission procedure was selecting out and excluding males (HFGD). They were also asked about what they felt joining a field that

was apparently left for females; if they felt differently; if felt that they were in a wrong place; and if they change their mind if given a second chance? They all responded that they didn't feel anything different for joining this field; that they can do what females do, and they didn't experience any different problem during practicum because of being boys. They said that it was not that they were in a wrong place; but the guideline stood for a wrong cause at a wrong time and condition and, therefore, needs to be revised.

The second critical concern is the entry (high school academic) profile of trainees at admission turning out to be low as indicated in Table 2 earlier. The college teachers were complaining a lot that the entry behaviors of the majority of candidates were substandard (unqualified and not assigned based on choice) both in terms of ability and interest to work with children (K10; D03; K09; K10). Those who are not having other options are joining the field (D05). Most of the students are assigned to the preschool department when they do not qualify for other programs (K09). If students who join our college are from grade 10, they are those who cannot join the preparatory. And if students who join our college are from grade 12, they are the ones who fail to join university. Even these with lower profile applicants come to us after they fail trying all other available choices; teaching is a last resort for our trainees (D05; H11). Preschool education considered the least in the choice and those with lower profiles preferring to join it; the field is considered as if it is meant for the weak, the underperforming (FGD, HCTE). The profile of the applicants for preprimary level compared to other teacher education programs in colleges is articulated in a very fascinating way in the following vignette:

> *We learned that those who feared that they might not get the chance to compete and win in other departments and those who have low self-*

> *esteem choose our department; thinking that it would not be difficult for women to compete with each other. In fact, sometimes there is a quota in the other departments, which means that if you do not compete in the mathematics department, you will have to enter preprimary (including boys) (H12).*

Teaching Faculty

Literature presents the academic discourse surrounding qualities of trainers of preschool teachers. Trainers of Preprimary Teacher Education Programs are expected to have so many qualities in one: be academically qualified, physically fit and healthy, active and energetic, socially warm and friendly, have love for children and teaching profession, use appropriate teaching skills, and have ability to tryout innovative and creative methods of teaching. Again, they have to develop interpersonal and interactive skills, be open to criticism, achieve the goals of the institution and develop rapport and creating friendly environment.

To begin with issues of selectivity of educators at employment, it has become crystal-clear over the course of the last decade that the teaching profession in Ethiopia has, in its broader sense, fallen into disfavor, if not a crisis. The traditional approach of predominantly relying on GPAs in recruiting college educators, grade inflations in institutions of higher learning amidst quality of education that has incessantly been on decline and the changing face of the teaching profession in Ethiopia increasingly growing into a source of discontent and disdain among incumbents would, from the outset, jeopardize the very pool from which selection is to be made. Profile of the teaching faculty is further nuanced amidst practices that restrict the freedom of colleges

to do the selection in their own terms thereby putting a system that buys in teaching staff without ECCE background [9](D02). It is not only that nearly all educators teaching subject matter courses to preprimary trainees were the same teachers trained for primary schools and lacked training on early childhood education, but also that they didn't even take note of the fact that this would make any difference in preparing those teaching young children (D06; H12, H13;D07; D01; H13). They also lack commitment (D06; H12, H13; D02) and, therefore, may not engage in self-learning to improve one's profile**.** Teacher trainers are module dependents. Every teacher teaches what is written in the module; we do not as such update ourselves with the contemporary developments" (D01).

Some trainers also seem to have undesirable attitude towards the preschool teacher program and the trainees in particular. "Teachers assigned to us from other departments are not happy believing that they are assigned to teach in a 'dead' zone; to express that the trainees hardly grasp what they are taught (H12). Another participant (D04) argued that both the trainers and the trainees are not interested in the preschool education program.

[9]For example, an interviewee said "the regional education office's hiring practice of college educators doesn't require background in preschool education like, for example, the previous year where 12 graduates were employed without adequate profile. The Office hired 12 graduates without any training in preschools but our graduates are better than them *(D02).*

Unexceptional to views above of ineffective teaching faculty is also observed where nearly all interviewees have indicated that those who teach core ECCE courses have the required level and type of qualification**,** are effective in all measures even if there are some individual differences ***(****K09; K10);* are committed *(K10),* have positive relationship, collegiality, and sense of cooperation among themselves *(K09; K10).* An interviewee expressed this commitment as follows: Seeing themselves from the trainees' perspectives, they indicated that they were working to become role models *(K09).*

Some interviewees have in fact indicated that the ECCE trained professionals have some gaps. For instance, "the department teachers who are ECCE graduates lack practical training and lack teaching techniques due to absence of enough skill-based training in the higher education" (H12). The actual training background of educators *per se* would lack practical skills required of college preschool educators. As it was also noted from some participants attending on-job short-term training that incited second thoughts about the quality of pre-service training, they received for longer to qualify for BA/ MA degrees (*D02; D04).* For example, an interviewee recalls an experience in a two-week training program: "This two-week training is by far better than what we had for three years in college in terms of helping children. We were qualified academically but not qualified to help and support children develop properly. The courses did not help us understand who children are what they need" (D02).

Resources

Preprimary teacher training colleges need resources to provide lessons for preschool teacher trainees. These educational resources can be acquired through several ways: they can be purchased from manufacturers or business people, brought to

colleges from communities in different ways (e.g. by student teachers during practicum), or developed in colleges themselves by experts/ developers (artists), trainees or educators. However, visits in the three colleges indicated that there are no preprimary education resource centers. This also means that ECCE courses including the development and utilization of ECCE resources are not brought to class through resources.

At the level of an individual instructor, responses regarding availability of resources are divided; not in fact contradicting but a difference in focus. Those saying "resource not available" *(K09; K10; K10; H11; H12, H13; D03; K10; K09)* seem to focus on what is missing. Those saying resources are not a problem are focusing on what they have. For example, the case of interviews from one of the colleges indicated, except for some who mentioned lack of books and videos **(**D03**)**, that lack of resource is not a problem (D01; D05; D02; D03; D04; D05; D06; D07) or consider resource constraints as personal problems of educators because they are manageable anyway (D04; D07; H11). One of the interviewee said *"*if the trainers are committed, resources are not as such concerns. By the way, training preschool teachers does not need sophisticated resources. We can use local materials*"* (D04).

Another participant complemented *"*in my previous experience in other college, trainees graduate after producing a set of preschool teaching materials as a package and that practice should have been practiced here. *Of course, it requires budget*" (D07).

The above two examples demonstrate that local resources are abundant in the communities, and they can be easily used for teacher training. However, educators need to possess a working knowledge, appreciative attitude and skills about selection,

organization, management, and utilization of locally relevant and developmentally appropriate resources.

Modules

Participants expressed, while discussing about curriculum materials, that there were different problems associated with the preparation of the modular materials including the fact that the modules under use were not developed for the relevant group, by relevant professionals and in relevant ways and, therefore, hardly contribute for preparing preschool teachers. The participants' indicated the limitations of the modules. The first groups of responses are related to the fact that the *modules not matching the level*; the modules were prepared to that of other diploma trainees and do not connect the trainees to their regular work (D06; H11).

The second frequently mentioned issues related to modules is the fact that the modules are not practical. The modules are not based on practical activities which reflect the actual preschool contexts. The modules are full of quotations from theorists like Freud and Erikson but how theories can be translated into practice is not indicated (D04).

A recurrent theme observed in the responses of participants is the fact that the modules were not practical enough to assist trainees develop understanding and skills about preschool education. Here is a statement from an interviewee that reflects the views of others:

> *We used to train preschool teachers at Certificate level. When modules were prepared for certificate program, they were more of practices. Preschool teachers should teach all subjects through play and when we*

> *had been training certificate level preschool teachers, much of our time was spent at the field. We were happy and trainees were also happy. When we come to the diploma level, the modules are all about theories. There is no practice in it. The diploma modules are not properly prepared and they are not good. As a result, after trainees graduated, they were not able to teach children. They know nothing about how they would teach children. When I ask them why they are not teaching practically or through play, they said that they were taught theoretical courses (D04).*

In fact, the authors of this article were also able to inspect the contents, formats, development and organization of three modules secured from educators in one of the colleges. The modules were found crammed with facts, less organized and less coherent, not dialogical and engaging the learners, less critical questions involved, and more importantly confine the learner to classroom setting and fail to encourage exploratory learning.

3. Processes and Contexts

Classroom Pedagogy

The participants were asked to share the prevailing pedagogical culture in their colleges. The responses categorized into different themes suggest that college practices that are created to invent and promote effective pedagogy are in themselves trapped by their own inappropriate practices as we can understand from their commentaries. Nearly all interviews have brought forward that the pedagogy employed to translate the curriculum into teaching was theoretical, lecture-based (K10; K08; K09), teacher-

centered (D03), not practice-oriented (H11; D02; K09; D02; D07), not student-centered, not technology-assisted (K09) and no demonstration as to how they should work while teaching children even when, according to an interviewee, some courses like assessment needed to be given practically (K09).

> *Supporting the ideas mentioned above a participant in one of the colleges stated "I do believe that preschool teacher training program should be practice-oriented. However, most of the time we teach theoretical issues than practical ones" (D03). Another participant also stated "We do not teach students in a practical way, except in practicum" (H11).*

Another participant (D06) relates trainees' lack of competence with the problems related to the pedagogical methods used in the teacher training colleges stating,

> *The reason that students are not competent is that we do not train them practically. We do not demonstrate as to how they can care, support and teach children. Everything is theoretical. We do not have enriched materials that can help them be competent teachers.*

Participants also expressed that the pedagogy was not play-based (D04; D06; K09; D05) even in courses about play. A teacher trainer participant (D01) in one of the colleges stated "The only courses that are relevant to preschool teacher trainees are two: play and material production. Even these courses are not properly offered. We teach the contents of play, not as to how they use play".

An important issue consistently raised as a problem particularly among interviewees from one of the colleges is use of a similar pedagogy in preschool teacher training that is used in primary school teachers' training. Related to this idea a participant (*D01*) revealed "The pedagogy we use while teaching ECCE students and teaching Chemistry or Physics or mathematics students should be different. But we use the same pedagogy for all teacher trainees*"*. In support of the above idea, another participant (D02) stated *"*when teachers are training preschool trainees and non-preschool trainees, they use the same pedagogy and this might be due to the lack of training as to how they could train preschool teachers".

The participants attributed their failure of using appropriate pedagogical methods to various external and very few personal factors. The most prevalent external factors mentioned by most participants include workload, large number of students and sections (K08; K09; K10), shortage of time (K09), the nature of the courses being unsuitable for student centered and practical teaching (H11), many of the courses are offered by other department teachers (H11), lack of conducive environment to make the training practical (D03) and unavailability of instructional technologies in the colleges (K09; K10).

Personal inadequacies like attitudinal problems, lack of skills and experiences were not mentioned except in few cases where the problem also includes trainers' lack of experience *(K09),* misconceptions about the meaning of student-centered pedagogy *(D01),* and lack of commitment *(D04).*

Student Practicum

The second important component of preschool teacher preparation is the practical aspect where trainee teachers are taken to preschools for learning teaching through practice. This component appears the single most unforgettable experience in the life of the trainees. It is unforgettable because it is emotionally laden; full of fear and uncertainties first, stressful in meeting expectations in the process but exciting to many when it is about to finish.

The design of this practicum component is composed of four courses that are developmentally organized into four phases. The first practicum is preschool visit and observation. In this practicum course, the students go to a preschool for four consecutive weeks and observe the overall situation of the preschool focusing on the location of the school grounds, environmental safety for children, playground and materials etc. The second practicum is working in the classroom with the children under the mentor's supervision.

They are expected to conduct critical classroom observation focusing on general activities in the classroom, such as school content, teaching methods, use of resources, and classroom management. The third practicum is referred to as "assisting the mentor" in which the students assist the preschool teacher in the works she does gain experience working together with the help of a regular classroom teacher, take assignments, develop teaching aids, and organize a portfolio. The fourth practicum course is "independent teaching" in which the students teach preschool children independently (K10) and substitute the teacher to teach for one month (H12, H13). In relation to this, participants were asked about their experiences of student practicum and shared their perceived importance, procedures, phases and challenges as presented here under

Concerning the perceived importance of student practicum

An interviewee (H11) believed that practicum during training does not seem to be very important in terms of qualifying trainees. The modules of the practicum are designed for elementary schools and do not connect the trainees to their regular work.

For example, a participant (D06) from one of the colleges stated "students do not apply what they have learned in the college during practicum; they rather learn new things from the preschools and apply this experience". Another participant from a different college indicated the practicum is highly relevant both for the students and for all the teachers who are involved in the practicum. We benefit a lot engaging in practicum supervision (K09). The participants also claimed that the practicum provides practical experience for trainees. For example, a participant indicated that:

> *Practicum plays an important role. If there was no practicum, it would be difficult for trainees to acquaint themselves to the job. It has psychological impact. When are introduced to a classroom, they feel shy and they improve this behavior through the practicum experience. They learn from the practicum as to how they can teach, children behave, and how to manage them. In their reflection after practicum, they reported that they didn't think that children's behavior was like what they have seen during practicum. At least it will not be new when they start the actual work (D04).*

In their responses concerning the practicum the participants discussed its objectives and focuses. A participant indicated that the practicum has the objectives/focusing, the first one is giving the students exposure to the preschool work environment. The second objective is to help the students to practice what they learn

theoretically in the real situation. The issue of child development, classroom management, student assessment, and pedagogy related issues are the focuses of the practicum course (K09).

A review of the practicum procedures from the practicum guides of the colleges indicated that the practicum in each phases is supposed to begin with orientation to both the students and staff before deployment to preschools, provide ongoing field-based joint supervision of college and preschool staff to monitor the progress of student teachers through provision of constructive, timely and concert feedback, followed by assessment of learning and finally a post-practicum conference to reflect on the entire processes and performances of the practicum. This being very pertinent procedures to ensure growth and learning through the practicum courses, the responses of participants, however suggest that the procedures were not observed consistently across colleges and within same college across years and also not conducted as per requirements, guides and formats.

Even if they endorse the importance of the practicum course, the teachers were worried about implementing the practicum as it is intended and they mentioned a variety of factors for the failure. Frequently expressed complaints include, for example, difficulties fully observing the procedures, pre-practicum orientations not being able to create readiness for the practicum (e.g., they did not even understand differences among the four phases), supervisions and follow ups being inadequate in many cases thereby limiting feedbacks for the trainees, and post- practicum conferences usually not held (K09; K10).

A number of technical, administrative and logistics problems were mentioned to justify the failures: lack of transport service for supervisors (K09; K10); no support and supervision particularly for students who were assigned in far woredas (H12, H13), lack of incentives to supervisors and preschool teachers (only 10 birr is given to preschool teachers as an incentive) (K10), random assignment of supervisors as in, for example, a physics teacher being assigned for supervision of a preschool trainee (D06), a physics teacher has no knowhow about preschool education and yet can be assigned and evaluate a preschool teacher trainee (D04; D07); "The current practice is that anyone instructor in the college who has never been teaching preschool teachers can be assigned to supervise them" (D07).

Additional problems reported from different colleges that require serious intervention include the following: lesser attention and lack of interest: Less attention given to practicum courses from the management (K10); the preschool supervisor's lack of interest to support the students and unable to give opportunity for the students to work under their supervision (K10). Time constraints: Shortage of time to complete all the practicum objectives (K09); what I do not like about the practicum is that the time is short and students cannot consolidate their experience. Trainees observed by their instructors only twice (D03); we observe them for 40 minutes and give them feedback. Then we repeat it once again and then (D04; D07). Discrepancies of formats: Discrepancies between the lesson plan format we teach to the trainees and the lesson plan students use in the practicum (D01). Grading concerns: This time around, practicum is becoming an opportunity for students to get better grade (D04).

Assessment

The assessment practices used by the preschool teacher trainers were assessed and the general observation of the responses indicated that assessment practices are limited in scope and not picky of data helpful to gain insight about children's developmental needs. They can generally be categorized into three themes as *purpose, assessment of preschool teacher trainees, and guideline.*

Regarding the purpose of assessment, the participants indicated that no practice of task-oriented assessment system is available; assessment did not measure improvement but focuses on academic achievements *(H11);* content of the assessment course itself not enough to assist trainees to assess the overall development of children after training *(H12, H13);* no portfolio assessment used (D07); formative assessment does not exist *(D04);* assessment for learning is not implemented, though the number of students is manageable *(D01);*assessment is only summative and implemented in order to grade students alone *(D04,).*

The assessment of preschool teacher trainees needs to be different as they are required to use different assessment techniques with preschool children. However, the participants indicated that there is no different assessment technique applied for preschool teacher trainees (D03). The same approach that is used to assess other diploma trainees is used (D05)

Assessment guidelines are provided in the colleges that determine what kind of assessment to use, and the weights to be given in fixing the final grades. For example, in one of the colleges, the legislation states a 40/60 ratio in which forty percent for final exam and 60% for continuous assessment. Interviewees indicate that it is impossible to

violate this or customize it according to the nature of courses *(D01; D02; D03; D04; D05D06).* In one of the institutes, too, there is a university-wide guideline to be followed as in other diploma programs suggesting 50% continuous assessment and 50% final exam (K*08; K09*). A similar guide exists in another college that the assessment involves 40% project, 20% mid-exam and 40% final exam. The project and tests (60%) are considered as continuous assessment and the remaining 40% is final exam*(D02).*

However, the continuous assessment seems to provide better freedom about the type and number of assessment techniques to be employed. A participant (K08) said "we use different types of assessments depending on the nature of the course. For some courses we use practical works as a means for assessment." Another participant from the same college stated "we try to use assessment methods that help us to assess the students' skills that help them to be good preschool teachers (K09)". A participant from a different college indicated that **"**we mainly use exams even for the continuous assessment; we use test 1, test 2, test 3 kind of assessment (D06).

Governance and Leadership

As a brain of an organization, governance /leadership is mandated to initiating and sustaining hard work, assuring and affirming early signs of success, systematically challenging the challenges confronting an organization than shying away from them and, in doing so, taking organizations to a higher level of performances.

While the traditional system of higher education has fundamentally taken stock of a triangular mission of teaching, research and community services, more recent reforms seem to institute rather more complex and hexagonal missions of teaching, research, community engagement, resource development, student support and

development, and staff support and development. In this regard, teacher education colleges in Ethiopia are fundamentally focused on educating trainee teachers; to a significant exclusion of the other two missions the traditional higher education system; not to talk of the hexagonal missions of colleges. In this regard, college governance activities have seen themselves unfolding, both in positive and negative ways, from the moment of student selection all the way to graduation and, in some cases, to post graduation experiences to understand its impacts on communities. A number of instances were observed in the previous discussions, as well as responses directly generated from participants that call for critical interventions in the leadership domain to ensure the ultimate success of the colleges. These areas of intervention are briefly presented below, beginning with student selection.

College engagements beyond teaching

In all the colleges and across many more, there has been role constriction and confinement of college engagements to the teaching domain alone; community and research engagements nearly non-existent.

Student selection and placement

There is a tendency toward feminization of preschool education as a result of the selection procedure that excludes boys. Furthermore, nearly similar procedures were observed with the primary teacher education in screening entrants for the preprimary one except for the requirement that gives priority to females.

Student support and development

Student support and development are fundamentally tied only to academic teaching in the classroom, and little support for student development is given, suggesting that students' holistic growth would be minimal. Even mentoring during practicum work was not to the expected level.

Faculty management, support and development

Course assignment was mentioned as an area inappropriate management was observed. The assignment of faculty in departments outside ECCE to teach preschool courses was random and anyone can be assigned irrespective qualification type, prior experience, level of preparation and interest (D02). Those who teach courses in one year are to be replaced by others who have never taught such courses in another year. Teachers did not even benefit from their experience (H12, H13). Here is an extended vignette from an interviewee.

> *Teachers coming from different departments train preschool teacher trainees. Those teachers who are assigned to preschool program are assigned by lottery method. However, rather than randomly assigning teachers, it would be better to assign teacher trainers using a definite criterion. For example, to teach English, teacher A would come this year and teacher B would come next year. Rather, a teacher should have been assigned every year or regularly so that he/she could learn through experience as to how they would train preschool teachers. Those who are assigned should also be given short-term trainings or refreshment courses (D07).*

Other interviewees have also complained that there has been a sort of competition in course assignment and ownership of those in professional fields with those in preschool department. …For example, there is a course named 'early childhood education'. This course had been offered by any faculty from professional department. But this course should have been offered by those who are trained in the discipline (D05).

Resource development

It was noted that there was an entire dependence on government budget and lesser initiatives were taken to pool resource from other different internal and external sources. As a result, there is scarcity of resources in colleges.

Faculty support and development

Faculty support and development, mainly the continuous professional development, is not adequately conducted as many participants mentioned. In fact, the Federal Ministry of Education has developed different strategies to facilitate development of teacher competence at different levels that include establishing the Teacher Development Program (TDP), and the continuous professional development (CPD) strategies and guides. Some NGOs working on children like UNICEF would at times take their own initiatives to provide training to educators and students on some emerging issues like play-based pedagogy, child assessment and children with special needs.

Three groups of responses were identified relating preschool teacher trainers' support for professional development. These are "not needed" (D04), "no support" (D03; D04; D07) and "some support" (D02; D06; H11).

Relationship with agencies outside colleges

Department has never discussed the quality, training, and definition of pre-primary education with the leadership of Woreda, Zone, Regional and some affiliate centers. During the practice, briefings will be provided to school principals and administrators through the program unit (H11). We also communicate and discuss with other stakeholders whenever we get the chance (K08). Important relationships seem to exist between colleges and NGOs who help through capacity development. There are short- term training workshops offered by NGOs such as UNICEF but these are individuals who may use it for themselves. We did not see them using this training at college, nor did we see them utilizing training contents to train preschool teachers (D06). UNICEF supports us to train in-service preschool teachers for O-class by acknowledging that the graduates have limitations in addressing children's needs (D02).

Participatory leadership

Curriculum development at the level of the Ministry of Education was not based on participation of adequate number of experts in the field **(**H11; K08**)** and yet colleges could not make revision to the curriculum despite the fact that the curriculum is not relevant (D01); module development was also indicated to be exclusionary of preschool teacher trainers (D04); and regions can only translate the curriculum into their local language (D02; D05). College level management not participatory and we are not happy

about that (K09); we do not participate on issues that are directly related to our program (K10). Participation in course and teacher placement, preparation of instructional teaching modules, participation in practical presentations and general briefing is not fair and participatory in another college (H11). Often people and staff who are closer to higher college officials are invited even though it is not their place to do so (H11). While there is a tendency for the college to do a good job, there is a gap in terms of system deployment (H12, H13). In our College, we have three staff graduated in ECCE at MA level. But ECCE is led by a curriculum graduate. There is a tendency of not giving the position to the ECCE graduates (D01).

4. Perceived Program Impact and Contexts

We need to begin with some affirmative responses from two interviewees saying that the college training is somehow beneficial: One of the participants said "actually we are producing relatively effective preschool teachers" (K09); "…they are more committed and interested trainees than those in other diploma programs*"* (D03). Keeping in view personal observation during practicum, this second interviewee (D03) remarks commitment among trainees; despite the fact that the trainees were from inadequate background:

> *We found our preschool trainees to be committed during field practicum, though they complained about lack of resources in preschools. Given their background limitation (as they are coming from grade 10 or 12) as well as their joining of the training because of lack of other opportunities, their performance as a result of the training they got from the College is promising (D03).*

Issues pertaining to competence of trainees were sidelined in the descriptions above. Attempts were also made to find excuse in the background of the trainees. Further, performances were gauged not against requisite teacher competencies but in reference to entry behaviors. In fact, descriptions that came in from the remaining others spoke against the contribution of the college training for producing competent preschool teachers (D02; D06; D07).

Entry behaviors of the majority of candidates being low as presented earlier, the design of the program not being relevant in preparing the trainees to work with children (D01; K10; H1; K09), limitedness of the number of courses directly related to preschool education or child development and education (D02) were repeatedly presented earlier. The general structure and implementation of the training program (H12, H13) including the pedagogy that is theoretical and lecture-based than practice-based (D05) were also mentioned as pitfalls. In an extreme way, interviewees from two colleges underscored that even the former one-year training program that they had was better than the current two-years diploma program in terms of design (K10) and delivery *(D04)* suggesting that it is not the duration but the nature of provision of the training that matters the most. According to a participant,

> *The department was able to produce effective teachers in those certificate-level training years. But, the quality of graduates begun to decline once the diploma program set in…almost all the courses in the certificate program were highly relevant and training was practical. Now, there are lots of problems that hinder our effort to produce qualified and effective preschool teachers (K10).*

This perceived limited contribution of colleges in preparing teachers would surly become frustrating to the genuinely committed educators. For example, one such educator gave a scathing comment, "If I say that the diploma module is killing the generation, I am not exaggerating; we are now re-training them after graduation" (D04).

We can add other issues captured from the interviewees that include conditions before graduation in colleges in terms of attention given to the program *(K09),* perceived work conditions after graduation and the preschool work environment not encouraging (K09), or affect the trainees' motivation and moral *(K08);* as the chances of getting further education opportunities are slim (K08; K09; K10); and, therefore, trainees are to continue to be preschool teachers at the same level(K09).

The general message seems to portray that the process of preschool teacher education in colleges does not seem to produce competent graduates. Now, we need to take the perspectives of trainees in terms of knowledge level, development of positive attitudes towards the profession and self-efficacy about their competencies.

Knowledge

Fourteen –items knowledge questions were presented to the trainees and the summary of their replies are presented in Table 3. As it can be referred into this table, the minimum score is 4 and the maximum is 14; the average being 8.2.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Students' Scores on Knowledge, Attitude and Self-Efficacy Items (N=66)

Domains of mastery	Number of items	Response format	Expected min, max and mean score	Observed scores		
				Min	Max	Mean
Knowledge	14	Forced-choice questions	0-14 (7)	4	14	8.2
Attitude	9	Five point rating scale	9-45 (27 or 3 in a five point scale)	17.00	45.00	32.65
Self-efficacy	12	Five point rating scale	12-60 (36 or 3 in a five point scale)	22.00	48.00	41.32

Attitude

The attitude score in Table 3 shows performance above the mid rating point which is closer to 'agree' suggesting that favorable attitude towards the profession seems a bit heavier than the unfavorable one.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an important variable in teacher development that determines the belief an individual has to carry out the teaching assignment successfully. The responses meaningfully alternate between sometimes and often, the average being closer to 'often'. This seems a higher score. Perhaps the last unit of analysis is to check the trainees' performances on the three variables; which is graphically presented in Figure 2. As it can be seen in this figure, self-efficacy is higher, followed attitude and then knowledge. It is like the fact that knowledge improves attitude and attitude improves self-efficacy as it was also observed in the correlation index.

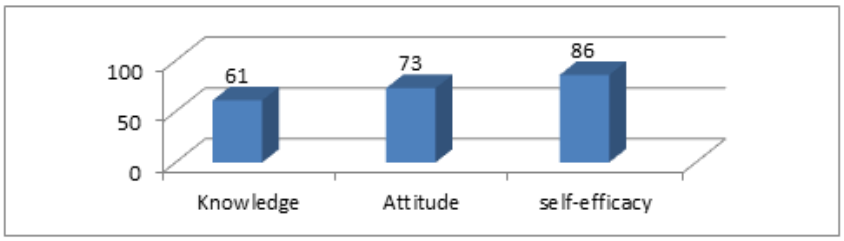

Figure2: Trainees' Performances on the three Measures

Discussion

The quality of preschool teacher education has been repeatedly shown to be a critical factor in building competencies of the professionals and impacting in the long run on the quality of learning and development of the children (Okeke & Drake, 2014; Gui, et al., 2020). The purpose of this study was to investigate the design (curriculum), inputs, delivery (implementation processes), and impacts (competencies of the trainees) of the existing preprimary teacher education program focusing on issues of effectiveness, relevance, coherence, collaboration (Darling-Hammond, 2007), perceived impact, and sustainability. Data presented in the previous section generally indicate that the preschool teacher education program's effectiveness, relevance, coherence and collaboration, impact, and sustainability experienced serious challenges.

Preschool Teacher Training Design, Input and Delivery

The data collected through various sources and analyzed earlier have generally shown that the quality of the curriculum, student and staff entry profiles, and program delivery were inadequate and fettered by various factors. The profile of students and staff did not seem to promise quality because of problems associated with, primarily, the

applicants' pool and the recruitment system and subsequent inadequate support and development services to compensate for these gaps. Curriculum relevance was bitterly critiqued by participants. Preschool teacher training internal coherence was seen to lack connection between stipulated objectives and courses, and courses and delivery mechanisms. External coherences were also critiqued for undue similarity of preschool teacher training to the preprimary teacher education in various forms. Input constraints were so limiting that preschool teacher training was delivered in ways that are minimally aligned with the needs and profile of early childhood education.

Some prior institutional research in the filed in Ethiopia can also invariably substantiate these findings. For instance, the national situation analysis conducted as an input to the formulation of the first ECCE policy in Ethiopia in 2010 has indicated several shortcomings that cast shadows on the professionalism of the preparation of preschool teacher training as well as early childhood education (Tirussew, Teka, Belay, Belay & Demeke, 2009).

This situation assessment unveiled that the major challenges were lack of proper training of preschool teachers; lack of standard curriculum and guidelines; lack of culturally relevant story books; low salary for teachers causing high staff turnover; lack of early childhood education professionals; and the use of foreign languages (mainly English) as a medium of instruction. At about same year, the Addis Ababa Education Bureau (2010) has also indicated that the sector has been suffering from lack of qualified teachers, and basic resources including facilities, equipment, space and physical set up. A study conducted in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region revealed that relevance of the curriculum, availability and qualification of preschool teachers were poor (Shanko et al.2019). One of the areas in which teachers

are supposed to be knowledgeable and skillful is the area of caring for children. A survey conducted in Addis Ababa, Lideta Sub City, indicated that only 40% of preschool teachers were knowledgeable about providing safety and security for children (Ganfure et al., 2018).

While these challenges still persist and affect the ECCE practice negatively, quality preschool teacher training could address at least some of these challenges. But, a more comprehensive national assessment of the education sector of the country conducted nearly a decade later to draw a 15 years national education roadmap has identified lots of implementation problems (curriculum, governance, qualification and morale of the teaching force, facilities and budget etc.) at all levels (preprimary, primary, secondary and tertiary) of the education system of which quality problems in preschool teacher training was one (Tirussew et al., 2018).

A situation analysis was conducted as an input to the 2010 formulation of ECCE policy in Ethiopia. In fact, a more relevant national evaluation of teacher training practices in Ethiopia across modalities has still identified that teacher preparation in Ethiopia including the pre-primary pre-service program (MoE, 2016) has such persistent problems as inappropriateness of the courses, trainees' lack of prerequisite knowledge, inadequate practical activities, and ineffective implementation of active learning (MoE, 2016).

A very recent MoE document on the new teacher education curriculum framework (MoE, 2022) has also come up with a conclusive stance that teacher preparation curricula at different periods failed to play their roles as agents of change and transformation in the field of education and by extension in the society at large

because they have not been based on analysis of the educational needs of the country. In the background section of a very recent MoE document of the new teacher education curriculum framework (MoE, 2022), it is stipulated in a comprehensive manner that that the curriculums developed at different periods failed to play their roles as agents of change and transformation in the field of education and by extension in the society at large because they have not been based on analysis of the educational needs of the country.

According to synthesis report of various studies in this same source, the curriculum in Ethiopia suffered from such drawbacks as: lack of relevance of contents, prevalence of difficult and overloaded contents in textbooks, absence of interactive learner-centered methodologies, improper implementation of continuous assessment, failure to promote and utilize indigenous knowledge, failure to effectively connect education to production, life, practice and work, lack of adequate and appropriate provision for using digital technology, failure to include moral education, and insufficient attention to differentiation. It is also indicated that studies have criticized the teacher education curriculum for making relatively more tilt towards knowledge and information and paying less attention to values and skills. Furthermore, it has been taken as being theory laden which resulted in its dissociation from activities which are practical, productive and socially useful. It is, therefore, important to ensure the prevalence of optimal balance among knowledge, attitude, and skills on the one hand and theory and practice on the other.

Small-scale individual research investigations on different aspects of the teacher education system have also invariably supported these concerns. For instance, as regards curriculum and implementation endeavors, the professional integrity of both

the development processes and implementation of the general education system was brought to question (Yayeh, 2017). A lot of problems were identified affecting the implementation process of curricula materials. Lack of professionalism in curriculum development at all levels and lots of implementation concerns in the education system that include organization and administration problems in the provision of quality education, qualification and professional profile of the teaching and administrative staff, concerns with pedagogical practices and the evaluation system, and undue political control of the education system that deprives personnel the professional right to exercise academic freedom.

In another study (Mulugeta, 2015), it was found that the 2014 curriculum had not been contextualized, problem of alignment between the previous early childhood care and education curriculum and what was being suggested in the early childhood care and education framework, strategy and guideline, the undue emphasis given to supportive courses than to early childhood care and education courses, and the absence of clear difference between practicum and action research courses. Thus, the studies imply that revising the early childhood care and education curriculum must be in line with the national early childhood care and education policy, strategy and guideline. Furthermore, many teachers are not adequately qualified for the level at preschool which they are expected to teach and some qualified teachers are not fairly distributed across regions.

Generally, it can be said that the early childhood education system including preschool teacher training is fettered by challenges and problems related to governance, curriculum, teachers' qualification, location, facilities and budget. With respect to teachers' qualification and benefits, it was found that, despite the fact that preschool

teachers' recruitment, preparation, professional development programs and teachers' salary and benefits are important components of preschool education quality, those components of a preschool education system were not given attention. Many of the preschool teachers are either untrained or very minimally trained to carry out their facilitation role. Preschool teachers' responses regarding their training status showed that the majority had minimal or short-term training and that their qualification is at a certificate level. The facilitators did not pass through any form of formal training except the short-term ones.

Experience also shows that preschool level is given less attention and those who are expected to be preschool teachers are not necessarily required to qualify for the level. The attention given to preschool teacher training, the social status they are accorded, the low payment compared to other teachers and several other factors have contributed to: 1) preschool teacher turnover, 2) lack of competent in-service preschool teachers, 3) lack of attracting competent pre-service preschool teacher trainees, 4) lack of job satisfaction in teachers, etc.

The demography of preschool teachers in Ethiopia is very diverse. The majority of teachers who are teaching in the preschool level are either not formally trained as preschool teachers or are graduates who use preschool teaching job as a temporary pastime until they find a desirable job elsewhere. There are also preschool teachers who are alien to education in general and early childhood education in particular. The case in Addis Ababa reveals that any graduate from any department can teach at preschool level in private preschools, especially if they speak fairly good English. In government preschools, any form of certification is enough to be a preschool teacher. At times,

grade teachers who have disciplinary problems are assigned to teach preschool children as a demotion or disciplinary measure.

The unique nature of training preschool teacher professionals requires examining what is really going on in the training colleges in line with the defined competencies of graduates, the self-efficacy and attitude of pre-service preschool teacher trainees, the curriculum content and pedagogy colleges implement to train preschool teachers, the materials and equipment used and other indicators.

In fact, while curriculum formulation initiated in 2014 was consistently revised to the extent that we are now having a new more professional framework tabled for implementation, a question arises as to the quality of the personnel who are tasked for observing the process. If the same task force is yet allowed to continue business as usual, then the curriculum design alone would hardly assist ensuring quality outcome in exactly the same manner that holding a new wine with an old sack would hardly ensure a desired change.

Perceived impacts and sustainability

Given all the challenges presented above, one would then fairly imagine that the perceived impacts of preschool teacher training on trainees' knowledge, skills, attitudes and self-efficacy are likely to be inadequate. It is not only the problem of adequacy of impact, but also sustainability in the sense that even the changes observed did not seem to sustain beyond immediate benefits because the education process is fact-laden, theoretical, and did not even address the cognitive aspect in the fullest sense. In this regard, reviews of local research on early years education and preschool teacher training summarized earlier have sent supportive evidence from different vantage points that the

required professional competencies of preschool teacher training teachers have been a point of concern for over the last several years (MoE, 2016; Ganfure et al., 2018; Tirussew et al., 2007; Shanko et al., 2019). Evidence seems to suggest that perceived problems are likely to characterize trainee's acquisition of the core knowledge base and practical skills of the developmental profile of the children, contents (concepts, principles and theories) of early childhood care and education, pedagogical methods including play-based pedagogy and effective interaction with children, children with special needs and issues of assessment. Logically, then, a lot more other core competencies of preschool teacher training teachers (National Research Council, 2015) can hardly be cultivated if these foundational ones are inadequate. Of critical ones among those not adequately cultivated can be competencies in working with diverse populations of children, promoting integration and cohesiveness, valuing, using and providing opportunities for children's capability and experience (Hatton & Smith, 1995).

Conclusions

The curriculum was severely critiqued for lacking relevance, appropriateness, and usefulness to the level. Pedagogical approaches were also indicated to be theoretical, lecture-based and not student-centered. Trainers' professional competences in the colleges did not seem to guarantee provision of services that make up competent graduates. A number of other problems were documented challenging the efficacy of this program.

Recommendations

Six major actions points are recommended to address the gaps noted in the short-and-long terms: 1) Stakeholders need to work towards the professionalization of the field of preschool education at all levels. 2) Revise rules, laws and procedures, and tools that jeopardize the professional practice of preschool teacher education. 3) Improve existing. 4) Institute and/or strengthen the resource base of the colleges. 5) Augment preschool teacher education by establishing model-off campus preschool center closer to each college. 6) Introduce new initiatives that scaffold preschool education as a national program.

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