



The Preprimary School Education Curriculum in Ethiopia: Foundations, Objectives and Guiding Principles

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate “the pre-primary school education curriculum in Ethiopia focusing on its foundations, objectives and guiding principles”. In doing so, the study attempted to indicate the conditions of foundational bases for curriculum, the comprehensiveness of objectives in the curriculum and the extent that the guiding principles of child development and learning are considered in the preparation of the curriculum for children of the period in Ethiopia. Both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed to conduct the study. Data were gathered from curriculum documents using documentary analysis and 362 preschool teachers using survey questionnaires of the rating scale interviews with open-ended questions. The data gathered were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and content analysis. The content analysis indicated that the philosophical, psychological and sociological bases for pre-primary school education curriculum are communicated in the syllabus but with limited clarity. The historical and technological bases for the preparation of curriculum were not totally indicated in the syllabus. The objectives in the syllabus for preschool education were focusing only on limited aspects of development and have limitation to use as a base for the work of preschool teachers. The objectives were also written in terms of teachers’ activities instead of being stated in students’ activities. The survey indicated that the twelve basic guiding principles of child development and learning were not properly taken in to account in the preparation of the curriculum. The curriculum has Problems in its preparation process, fitness for children, timing in achieving objectives, its continuity to primary education, and alignment of objective to contents. Thus, the preschool curriculum has undeniable gaps in terms of foundational bases, objectives and consideration of principles in its preparation. The curriculum materials were not available in all preschools of Ethiopia.

Keywords: Comprehensive Objectives; Early childhood Care and Education Curriculum; Foundational Bases for Curriculum; Guiding Principles of Child Development and Learning ; Preschool Education,

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1. Introduction

In the sequential human developmental stages, the early childhood period is considered as critical time for the development and learning of children due to its significance and far reaching effects in the later life of the individuals (Dodge, 2004). The development and learning of children in the period bases on the use of comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE) program (Awopegba, Oduolowu, & Nsamenang, 2013). The early childhood care and education (ECCE) has the goal of providing services that involve health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development in the period (MOE, 2010; Mulugeta, 2015) for children with the use of relevant and quality curriculum. The use of relevant curriculum facilitates children readiness for their further schooling and their future life. The relevance of the curriculum bases on knowledge of individual children and principles of child development and learning combined with knowledge of effective early learning practices to cater the best possible experiences, learning conditions, and pedagogies for young children which are reflected in the foundational bases for and comprehensiveness of objectives in the curriculum.

The presence of adequate foundational bases and comprehensive objectives as well as the consideration of the guiding principles of child development and learning in the preparation of the ECCE curriculum enhances the appropriateness of the curriculum for children that address three main areas of “appropriateness”: age appropriateness, individual appropriateness, and context appropriateness (NAEYC, 1997 and 2009). Ornstein A.C. and Hunkins F.P. (2004) indicated that the foundational bases (as philosophical, psychological, sociological, historical as well as technological) and the comprehensive objectives for the holistic development of children that involve all aspects of development are basic elements in the preparation of school curriculum including preprimary school curriculum. In connection to this, considering and following standard guiding principles of child development and learning in the preparation of curriculum could be so crucial to make the curriculum appropriate for the learners.

The foundational bases and the comprehensiveness of objectives as well as the guiding principles of child development and learning link to the ideas of various learning theories and pedagogies like ideas of behaviorists, social learning theorists, developmentalists, constructivists, and humanistic theorists. The behavioral theories advertise didactic models of direct instruction of facts to the entire classroom children in shaping all aspects of behavior using *positive reinforcement to ensure* the repetition of a behavior for future use (the *behavioral theory* of Skinner). The social learning theory gives focus on learning through social interaction as imitation *based on planned* curriculum for children (*social learning theory* of Bandura). But, the developmentalist theories inform the need to make the curriculum appropriate for the age, individual, and context of children to help them develop in their own pace directing their learning by identifying needs of the different stages children, beginning with a need for trust for infants, autonomy for toddlers, and initiative for preschoolers, (*psychosocial theory* of Erickson). The constructivist theories indicate the need to present advanced pedagogy to children as an active participants in the socio-cultural environment believing on the social and cultural forces that shape intellectual ability using language as a primary tool for conveying society’s values and highlighting the scaffolding effect from assistance of children’s learning by adults in the “*zone of proximal development*” (*the socio-cultural*

theory of Vygotsky) (Wong, 2001). Whereas, the humanistic theories dictate to consider children as human being with their own needs, motivation and self-concept to make them participate in self-regulated learning with the use of positive feedback to enhance their different levels of needs (as physiological and social-emotional needs) and help them form identity of their own by minimizing frustration in that keeping it at appropriate level (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2004).

Regarding this, Wood and Hedges(2016) concluded that the frame work for ECCE curriculum has always been drawn from a range of ideologies and theories that inform curriculum developers and implementers about relevant curriculum. The framework enables to recognize the foundations built from the outstanding work of different well known educators in the field as scholar whose works have been predominantly influencing the early childhood settings and practices in many countries as Jean Piaget, Erikson, and Lev Vygotsky (Kumtepe, 2005) and the early time pioneers and contributors in the field like John Dewey and Maria Montessori, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Robert Owen and Friedrich Froebel who created better understanding about relevant curriculum and its practice in the period as well as the ideas gained from the Current research (Aggarwal, 1985).

The works of different scholars use as base to study the curriculum in that taking the best and fit ideas of the theorists to make the ECCE program relevant for children in different contexts so that various perspectives are required to explain the holistic development of children engaging them in the experiential learning in various social life activities in the educational practice at preprimary school settings (Wong, 2001). In connection to this, Goffin (2003) and Kagan and Kauerz (2012) indicated that ideas of different scholars are taken in to account in combination to serve as principal foundations for the preparation of curriculum and then use as base for the practitioners of ECCE program to ensure appropriate practice.

Therefore, developing ECCE curriculum on the bases of different scholars' ideas can serve as base to make *child-centered curriculum in that children* become the primary source of curriculum with real and attainable goals focusing on their interests and experience and then *integrated curriculum that can* enhance children's meaningful and joyful learning with well-connected subject-matters. Such type of curriculum is represented by developmentally appropriate curriculum.

In these days, the developmentally appropriate curriculum is enjoying wider acceptance due to its beneficial effect on children's emotional well-being as an important prerequisite to intrinsic motivation and optimal learning; cognitive development; and its relevance in theory-based beliefs (Bredekamp and Copple, 1997) in that synthesizing ideas from many theories as base in its design and implementation. The developmentally appropriate curriculum refers to the curriculum designed on the basis of information about what children are able to do cognitively, physically and socially, emotionally at a certain age by being responsive for each child unique needs in the social and cultural contexts. It is appropriately planned *curriculum* on the base of knowledge of theory and research about how children develop and learn, with special attention given to individual children's needs and interests in relation to program goals at the context in which they live (Kostelnik,, Soderman,& Whiren,2004)

The developmentally appropriate curriculum (DAC) reflects all foundational bases as philosophical, psychological, sociological, historical , and technological foundations,

involves comprehensive objectives covering all aspects of development, and considers guiding principles or beliefs about development of children and their learning as: (a) children are competent and eager learners, (b) they should learn integrating the specific subject areas of learning (like math, science, language) with their experiences (like cooking, gardening, constructing); and (c) they need exposure to all domains of development—physical and motor, language, cognitive, social and emotional and a single domain does not take precedence over any other (NAEYC and IRA, 1986 and Kagan, and Kauerz, 2012) so that focuses on whole child development through child's interactions with adults in appropriate environments (Wong, 2001).

Thus, the preparation of appropriate ECCE curriculum is central to children's learning and development for it acts as the "front line" of children's experiences, knowledge and skills children gain, the application of pedagogical approaches, and the nature of teacher-child interactions. But, the preparation of appropriate ECCE curriculum for children of different ages could not be an easy task due to the diversity of young children with variety of needs in ECCE program at different contexts (Kagan and Kauerz, 2012). In Ethiopian context, the provision of care, support and education for children focuses on enhancing the quality, accessibility and equitable distribution of the services for children (MOE, 2010). To ensure relevant and quality care and education services for children of the period, the ECCE curriculum of Ethiopia has been brought in the form of syllabus. The syllabus of the preprimary school education of Ethiopia was prepared in 2009 with five thematic areas (MOE, 2009). It is assumed that the syllabus as document of curriculum is prepared by incorporating the various developmental domains based on the philosophical, psychological, and social as well as historical and technological foundations and considering the guiding principles in preparing the relevant ECCE curriculum as indicated in international literature (Bredenkamp and Copple, 2009). Contrary to this, as learned from experience, the development and learning of children in the preschools of Ethiopia were associated with many problems. The various foundational bases did not seem in use as base in the preparation of the curriculum, the objectives did not seem comprehensive enough to involve all aspects of development and guiding principles of child development and learning might not be properly considered in the development of the curriculum. In line with this, it is assumed that "the preprimary school education may be conducted based on inappropriate curriculum bases (foundations, objectives and principles) for practice". Thus, this assumption initiates the curiosity of the researcher to conduct study on the status of the ECCE curriculum to disclose the existing conditions related to the bases of the curriculum development for children of the period.

On top of this, the curriculum for preschoolers in Ethiopia did not get due attention till recently from the researchers. Of course, there are various published research works in the area but they all focused on general issues either at national level (e.g., status of ECCE (Tirussew, 2007; Tirussew et al, 2009); the problems and academic achievement (Tsegie, 2007); strategies and approaches (Augustine, 2007); pathways through ECCE (Woodhead and Martin, 2009)) or specific setting of the country (e.g., ECCE current status and challenge in West Amhara sub-regions (Mihert, 2015); in A.A. (G/Egzibher, 2014); prospects of provision of Kindergarten education in government program (Yalew, 2011), and in sedentary and agro-pastoral societies: (Yigzaw, 2015); quality of ECCE in Bole and Kirkos sub-cities (Rahel G. 2014) and in Addis Ababa from (input-process-output) (Girma, 2014), and contribution of ECCE centers in creating access and

delivering quality education in Addis Ababa (Andualem , 2014), as well as ECCE teachers and the profession at Mettu Town (Kassahun, 2017) and in Addis Ababa (Manaye, 2017)) or study on secondary data (e.g., reflection on the current practice of developmental appropriateness and cultural responsiveness of ECCE program in Ethiopia (Girma, 2019)).

The various studies about ECCE in Ethiopia did not touch curriculum and related issues of ECCE like contents in the curriculum for learners of different schooling level including the primary school education (Meskerm, 2017). The curriculum for preprimary school education in Ethiopia is one of the areas that needs to get due attention from researchers. The Preprimary school curriculum research becomes necessary to make the practice best fit for children learning and development. This is the other initiate factor to conduct study in the area of ECCE curriculum to air out the prevailing conditions of the curriculum in the Ethiopian context with the help of empirical evidence. Due to the afore mentioned initiating factors, conduct research in the area of ECCE curriculum focusing on the foundational bases for curriculum development, the comprehensiveness of objectives, and the consideration of standard principles of child development and learning as guidelines in the preparation of relevant curriculum for children seems so essential. As a result, it was planned to study whether the preparation of the curriculum bases on scientific foundations, involves comprehensive objectives and considers standard principles for serving the different needs of children in the country to produce educationally meaningful effects in the learning and development of children. So, the question that states “To what extent the ECCE curriculum is prepared considering different foundational bases, including comprehensive objectives and following standard guiding principles to make it appropriate for children and to bring quality in the area?” should be question to be raised in this connection. Thus, studying foundational bases, the comprehensiveness of objectives and the consideration of guiding principles of child development and learning in preparing curriculum seems advisable for students and educators in the field of education to suggest mechanisms for the future betterment of the program in that initiating other concerned bodies for actions in Ethiopia.

The focus of the study was assessing the appropriateness of the curriculum basing on some indicators of relevance of ECCE curriculum for children in Ethiopia at three study sites due to different limiting factors. These indicators of relevant curriculum for children can be put diagrammatically as follows.

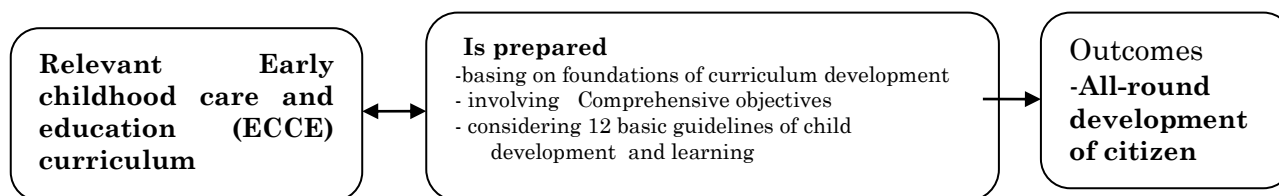


Figure 1: conceptualizing the variables of the study

The preparation of ECCE curriculum needs to include foundational bases and comprehensive objectives, and consider standard guiding principles of child development and learning in line with the age, uniqueness, and context of children to lay base in

creating well-developed citizen in the future. So, the focus of the study was investigating the adequacy of the foundational bases and the comprehensiveness of objectives and the extent that the guiding principles of child development and learning are considered in preparing appropriate ECCE curriculum for promoting relevant practice at the preprimary schools of Ethiopia. It is assumed that the study has its own benefits for the curriculum developers, the curriculum implementers/practitioners, parents, teacher training institutes, and other concerned bodies (like school administrators and supervisors) of preschool education as well as children of the period. In this study, it was tried to indicate the present status of the foundational bases of ECCE curriculum and comprehensiveness of objectives, examine the extent that guiding principles of child development and learning are considered in preparing ECCE curriculum, and show some obstacles in making the preschool curriculum fit for children and the measures to be taken to alleviate the limitations of the ECCE curriculum appropriateness for children in Ethiopia. Thus, in the research process, it was tried to explore answer for the following basic research questions.

1. Does the preprimary school curriculum of Ethiopia involve various foundational bases (as Philosophical, sociological, psychological, historical and technological bases) that make the curriculum relevant for children?

2. Does the preprimary school Curriculum of Ethiopia involve comprehensive objectives that address all developmental aspects of children in Ethiopia?

3. To what extent the basic principles of child development and learning are considered in the preparation of ECCE curriculum of Ethiopia as perceived by teachers?

4. What are the conditions that affect the appropriateness of curriculum for children and what could be the measures to be taken to minimize the influence of the conditions /factors in the curriculum preparation?

2. Method

In studying “The preprimary school education Curriculum in Ethiopia focusing on foundational bases, objectives, and guiding principles”, the descriptive survey with exploratory design was used as methods of study. Data were collected using different tools as the survey questionnaire of rating scale types, interviews with open-ended questions and documentary analysis from different sources. While the questionnaire was used to generate quantitative data, the interview and documentary analysis were used to yield qualitative data. Thus, the study was demonstrating the compliment of using survey quantitative and exploratory qualitative methods in one study. The descriptive survey approach uses to study the consideration of guiding principles in preparing ECCE curriculum as perceived by concerned bodies as preschool teachers. The exploratory approach on the bases of data collected through documentary analysis, interviews using open ended questions explore the fundamental bases for and the comprehensiveness of objectives in the curriculum. To arrive at problems related to ECCE curriculum preparation and the possible measures to be taken in the future, data were collected using interviews with a few selected preschool teachers and trainers with open ended questions.

The sources of data for the study were the curriculum documents (like syllabus and other curriculum materials) of preschool education and people participating directly in the preschool curriculum development and implementation process in Ethiopia. Therefore, while key participants in the development and implementation of ECCE curriculum were used as primary sources of data, the curriculum materials of preschool education like syllabus, and teacher's support materials were used as secondary data sources. About 362 participants of the preschool education mainly preprimary school teachers from the three study areas were used to collect data using questionnaire. Multistage sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used to select sample places and/ or preschools in study areas and for selecting teachers from preschools, respectively. For the purpose of documentary analysis, the syllabus of ECCE and other supplemental materials prepared on the base of the ECCE syllabus and other documents used as textbook were taken as available. On the bases of convenient sampling technique, about ten preschool teachers and five trainers were used to conduct the interviews.

The variables of the study are the indicators of the foundational bases for appropriate ECCE curriculum (the inclusion of ideas of scholars as learning theories/perspectives and the incorporation of basic principles of learning and the comprehensiveness of objectives) that use as base to satisfy the needs of preprimary schools children at different contexts. The foundational bases for appropriate ECCE curriculum can be conceptualized in this study as inclusion of ideas of different learning and development theories and comprehensiveness of objectives that represent different developmental directions to be considered in the preparation and implementation of the preprimary schools education. These variables were approached through document analysis for evaluating their relevance and adequacy as communicated in the ECCE materials in implementing fit curriculum for children. The guiding principles can be assessed as perceived by participants of the study using questionnaire. Besides, factors that have influence on ECCE curriculum and the strategies to be taken to alleviate the problems as other variables of the study were explored using interviews with open ended questions. Thus, the tools for data collections were questionnaire of the rating scale types, documentary analysis, and interview with discussion questions.

The questionnaire scales are scales that are constructed based on the literature **for use to** collect data about the extent that guiding principles are considered in the preparation of ECCE curriculum. The rating scale type questionnaire contains 12 items that involve the guiding principles child development and learning to be used as base for curriculum preparation. Items of this category were rated showing the extent that the curriculum incorporated the issues represented by the statements.

All items of this category of the questionnaire scales were rated from maximum of 5 to minimum of 1 points for positive items and vice versa for negative items. For all items, the summative scores below 50% or average or mid points (the I and II quartile scores) were representing low level or disagreement position, 50% - 75% (the III quartile score) were representing medium level or neutral position and above 75% (the IV quartile scores) were representing high level or agreement position. For instance, the 12 items of guiding principles as a whole yielded a summative scores ranging from 12 to 60 with below midpoint 36 (the I and II quartiles), the middle 25% scores, i.e. 36-48 (the III quartile), and above middle (above 75% i.e., above 48 – the IV quartile) scores for a respondent. Similar scoring scheme was applied to assess score of total participants in

each individual item, too. Whereas, the total scores for the 362 participants of the study, the total scores below 1086 were low (I and II quartiles) , scores from 1086- 1468 were middle (III quartile scores) and above 1468 scores were high (above 75% scores). The reliability of the scale used to collect data about the guiding principles in the preparation of the ECCE curriculum was calculated based on the data collected from 71 sample members. So, the reliability of this measure was Cronbach's alpha = 0.93. But, the validity of the scale was commented on the items ability to measure the variables under investigation by the professionals in the areas.

Documentary analysis was used to collect data about the incorporation of foundational bases in the ECCE curriculum to shape curriculum elements as contents communicated in the syllabus that contribute for development of children and the comprehensiveness of objectives in ECCE curriculum using documents.

Open ended interview questions with selected few preschool teachers and trainers were used for collecting data that were used for the purpose of triangulating and complementing the data collected using the questionnaire scales and document analysis. Besides, the interview questions were used to collect information about the problems and measures to be taken for alleviating the problems in preparing the ECCE curriculum.

The data analysis was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. In this study, the intention is to investigate the appropriateness of ECCE curriculum for children in ensuring fit practice at preprimary schools. The data collected through questionnaires were coded, entered, cleaned and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 19). The quantitative data were reduced into descriptive statistics such as percentages, mean and sum, whereas the qualitative data were analyzed following rules of logic.

3. Results

The curriculum for preschool children could be assessed focusing on the presence of foundational bases and comprehensive objectives and the consideration of basic guiding principles in the preparation of curriculum documents as syllabus. In trying to study the presence of foundational bases and comprehensive objectives in the curriculum, syllabus as one of the curriculum documents was evaluated. To assess the extent that guiding principles of child learning and development are considered in the preparation of the curriculum documents (as syllabus or other curriculum documents), questionnaire were used to explore the experiences of the professional in the field. The challenges in preparing relevant curriculum for children and possible remedies for the challenges were explored collecting data conducting interviews with concerned bodies as teachers and trainers. In doing so, data were collected from documents and preschool teachers and trainers. The collected data using questionnaire of the rating scales types were used in the survey study and the data from documentary analysis, open ended questions, and interviews were used for the exploratory study. The collected data were organized and analyzed under the headings: 1) The foundational bases for the ECCE curriculum in Ethiopia; 2) The comprehensiveness of objectives in ECCE curriculum of Ethiopia, 3) The consideration of guiding principles of child development and learning in ECCE curriculum preparation, & 4) The obstacles in making ECCE curriculum appropriate for

children and measures in alleviating the problems. So the results are presented as follows in the same order.

3.1. Foundational Bases of Preprimary School Education Curriculum

The ECCE curriculum (mainly syllabus) of Ethiopia (MOE, 2009) consists of information about the preprimary school education foundational as philosophical bases, the general objectives, contents for different thematic areas of the preprimary school education, the organization and the utilization of the curriculum, the distribution of periods and the time allotted for the thematic areas as well as the developmental directions for preschool children of Ethiopia.

The syllabus is expected to indicate the complete foundations for developing and implementing preprimary school education curriculum. The statements about the foundational bases for preprimary school education curriculum should clearly indicate the philosophical, psychological, social, and historical and cultural bases as well as technological bases. The ideas about the foundational bases of preprimary school education curriculum are stated in the syllabus as:

“there is a need to lay base for developing citizens who contribute in the building of the society; consider special experiences, hopes of children to get new things, feelings, outlooks and abilities in order to accept, understand, and develop the individual behaviors; base on the eagerness of children to know truths; make children find relation of shapes and design to arrive at conclusions; enhance understanding of children to make them interact with their environment; touch the various developmental aspects of children and develop self-confidence due to activities they do and using plays, carefully prepared equipment and happenings as well as create enabling environment of learning” (MOE, 2009).

The paragraph that states *“there is a need to consider special experiences, hopes of children to get new things, feelings, outlooks and abilities in order to accept, understand, and develop the individual behaviors and base on the eagerness of children to know truths; make children find relation of shapes and design to arrive at conclusions”* seems to indicate the philosophical base of the Early Childhood Care and Education curriculum. The statements as the foundational bases of preschool curriculum in Ethiopia seem to reflect more of the idea of pragmatic and constructivist perspectives as base in organizing and practicing the preprimary school education. This is also augmented by the approaches communicated in the syllabus that states as *“using activities children do and plays on the bases of carefully prepared equipment and happenings by creating an enabling environment of learning”*. Here, the approaches communicated by the constructivist and behavioral learning theories seem to be combined together.

The phrases that state *“the preschool education needs to touch the various developmental aspects of children and develop self-confidence”* seem to indicate the psychological foundation of the curriculum in that the developmentalists perspective is reflected in a very condensed way. But, the phrases that states as *“lay **base** for developing citizens who contribute in the building of the society and enhance*

understanding of children to make them interact with their environment” seem to reflect the sociological base of the curriculum.

3.2. The Objectives in Preprimary School Education Curriculum

The objectives for the preprimary school education of Ethiopia were also communicated in the syllabus for practice. The syllabus indicated the overall preprimary school education objective of Ethiopia stating as “*preschool education is targeted at laying base for full-fledged and balanced development of children*”. The syllabus was also indicating the detailed objectives of ECCE as

“to accomplish different activities and adapt to keep healthy system using different body parts and sensory systems; build experience and skills of recognizing, scrutinizing, understanding, appreciating, using and caring for the environment integrating with it and to have a tendency to solve problems faced in daily lives, develop skills of receiving information, think, understand appropriate ways of expressing ideas and needs and accepting others ideas and understanding differences; and develop skills of living in harmony with and understanding others , realizing and caring for the self in line with acceptable experience and living systems in the community due to interaction with people in their surroundings” (MOE, 2009).

As learned from the given paragraph , the objectives of preschool education are focusing only on the physical development as reflected in the phrase that states “to accomplish different activities and adapt to keep healthy system using different body parts and sensory systems”, social development with elements of emotional development as understood from the phrases “to build experience and skills of appreciating, using and caring for the environment integrating with it to have a tendency to solve problems faced in daily lives, and develop skills of living in harmony with and understanding others , realizing and caring for the self in line with acceptable experience and living systems in the community due to interaction with people in their surroundings”, cognitive as indicated in the phrases “to build experience and skills of recognizing, scrutinizing, understanding the environment to solve problems faced in daily lives” and “understand appropriate ways of expressing ideas and needs and accepting others ideas and understanding differences” - language aspects of development. Therefore, the syllabus as basic document for ECCE focuses on physical, cognitive (including language and mathematical abilities as well as thinking about the environment) and social including emotional aspects of development with different numbers of expected outcomes. These facts are also reflected by the objectives of each of the thematic areas in the syllabus.

3.3. The consideration of basic Guiding Principles of child development and Learning in the Curriculum

The appropriateness of preschool education curriculum for children can be assessed on the basis of the extent that the guiding principles of child development and learning are considered in its preparation. Regarding this, Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) indicated that

the preparation and implementation of preschool curriculum should consider the different standard principles of child development and learning. In line with this, about twelve basic principles that should be considered in the preparation and then implementation of the preschool curriculum are communicated by different scholars (for instance, NAEYC, 1986 and Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). The extent of considering the twelve basic principles in the development of curriculum for preschool education could be taken as indicator for the appropriateness of the curriculum for preschool children. So, preschool teachers were asked to rate the extent that the twelve guiding principles of child development and learning were considered in the preparation of preprimary school curriculum of Ethiopia using a five point rating scale ranges from 1-5 (where, 5= it is considered at very high level, 4=high, 3=average, 2= low to 1= it is considered at negligible level). So, the extent that the twelve principles of child development were considered in the preparation of Ethiopian preschool curriculum to make the curriculum appropriate for the preschoolers as perceived by the preschool teachers is communicated in the table1.

.Table1: The incorporation of the standard principles in the preschool education curriculum practice

R No	Principles	Percentage of responses as to the extent that standard principles are considered in the preschool curriculum preparation							
		Below average		Average		Above average		Total score for each item	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Consider all developmental areas as important to create whole child.	16	5.0	106	29.3	248	65.8	1326	73.2
2	follow sequential process with clearly stated objectives	27	7.5	115	31.8	220	60.8	1252	69.1
3	proceed at same rates for each child *	41	11.3	125	34.5	196	54.2	1194	65.9
4	Result from the interaction of maturation and experience.	38	10.5	127	35.1	197	54.4	1207	66.9
5	Are profoundly affected by early experiences.	43	11.9	123	34.0	196	54.1	1196	66.0
6	Proceed toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.	34	9.4	119	32.9	219	57.7	1267	70
7	occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts	47	13.0	116	32.0	199	55.0	1191	65.8
8	advance when children are challenged with achievable tasks with support.	30	8.3	131	36.2	201	55.6	1227	67.8
9	Can happen in a variety of ways.	30	8.3	112	30.9	220	60.8	1246	68.8
10	occur at best when they have secure relationships with others.	28	7.7	141	39.0	193	53.3	1225	67.6
11	Enhance experiences to shape their motivation and approaches.	38	10.5	109	30.5	215	59.4	1256	69.3
12	Promote self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence using play.	28	7.7	108	29.8	226	62.4	1192	65.8
	Average	43	11.9	119	33	198	55.4	1192	65.8

*. Rated in the opposite direction

As indicated in table 1, 53.5 % up to 65.8% (i.e. around average or at third quartile level) of preschool teachers were reported about the consideration of all guiding principles of child development and learning in the preschool curriculum at high level. It is below 75% of the respondents who reported the consideration of all the twelve principles of child development and learning in preschool curriculum practice at high level. The

medium percentage of the preschool teacher-respondents who reported the consideration of the guiding principles in preparation and then implementation of the curriculum vary from 53.3% in creating secure relationships for the best development of children to 65.8% in making the curriculum to consider all domains of development. About six out of twelve guiding principles (i.e., making curriculum challenging but with achievable tasks in multiple social and cultural contexts, considering the interaction of maturation and experience, and creating profound early experiences, and creating secure relationships for the best development and learning of Children) were reported as principles taken into account in ECCE curriculum preparation by less than 55% of respondents (i.e., around average point). Besides, 54.2% of the respondents reported that the curriculum is not prepared considering the developmental level of each and every child age levels rather it considers development and learning as it proceeds at same rate for all. Taking the overall average percentage of all responses, it is only 55.4% of the respondents who reported the consideration of basic guiding principles of child development and learning in the preparation of curriculum for the preschool education. On top of this, using the total scores of the 362 respondents and dividing all scores of respondents into below average scores (scores of the I and II quartiles, i.e., scores from 362-1068) as low, the middle 25% scores (scores of III quartile, i.e., 1048-1446) as medium, and scores above 75% (scores of IV quartile, i.e. above 1446) as high, respondents reported that the twelve principles were considered at the medium level but not at high level as expected in the preparation of the preschool curriculum. Besides, as learned from observation of the document, the preschool education curriculum development practice did not follow all the basic principles as expected level.

3.4. The Obstacles in making Curriculum fit for Children and Measures to Alleviate the obstacles

3.4.1. The obstacles in making curriculum relevant for children

Through Interviews with professionals in the field (preschool teachers and trainers), document analysis, and open ended questions, problems were observed in ECCE curriculum practice. Some of the problems were problems related to the curriculum preparation process, problems related to the availability of the curriculum materials for practice, problems related to the fitness of the curriculum materials for practice, problems related to the logical ordering of objectives and contextualization of materials, continuity, and lack of standard in written objectives.

1. Problems Related to Curriculum Preparation: Benchmarking and Responsible Organ

As learned from documents, the preparation of ECCE curriculum (syllabus) has been done at different times in Ethiopia starting from 1997 though there was an endeavor in 1973. The preparation of Ethiopian preschool curriculum was done on the basis of experiences from different countries like England, Israel, and Russia, South Africa and Uganda (MOE, 2009). The 1997 ECCE curriculum was focused on contents of different subject areas (language, mathematics, social sciences, and natural science subjects) like the subjects of the primary schools. It was prepared only for children of age 4-5 and 5-6 with application of teacher-centered approach so that it was criticized as it is not child-

centered curriculum (MOE, 1909). Due to its focus on different subject areas, the curriculum was revised in 2006 and then 2009. The 2009 curriculum for preschool education was organized for children of the three age levels (3-4, 4-5, and 5- 6 years) under five themes with competence-based approaches (MOE, 2010) that focused only on physical, cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of development. The curriculum materials were limited and the materials were prepared by initiatives of individuals with the aid of non-governmental organization except the syllabus without responsible organ meant for the purpose especially in recent times.

2. The availability of curriculum materials for practice: Through documentary analysis and interview with preschool teacher, it was learned that the curriculum materials for preschool education are syllabus, some supportive materials (that are prepared by NGO found in limited preschools of Addis Ababa), and the teacher's guides (used only in some schools that are copy of the supportive materials as reported by teacher-trainers). Thus, syllabus is the only main material for many preschool teachers for use. Preschool teachers try to teach, coach and guide children preparing plan and materials of their own using only syllabus. The syllabus was not also available in some preschools.

3. The Fitness of Curriculum Materials for Practice: The syllabus of preschool education does not communicate the timing when to teach different contents in order to achieve the objectives. It is expected from teachers to adjust the time that they assume suitable time for teaching in line with the developmental levels of children. It is also clear that the syllabus does not allow teachers follow time table fit for developmental level of children for it is not supported by proper teacher's guide and student textbooks. So, it is only the teacher who is expected to plan for timing in using different approaches for helping children to learn, engage children in free and planned play, guide children to write freely and to draw pictures, to write on a paper with the intention of saving space on the paper.

4. Other pitfalls in preschool education: Through interview with teacher-respondents, additional challenges were reported in the task of preparing developmentally appropriate curriculum for children. Some of the other challenges were lack of continuity/bridge between preprimary and primary education, the presence of difference in expectation from different concerned bodies as well as missing disable children.

The implementation of the preschool education curriculum is associated with problems as:

- Lack of bridge between preprimary and primary education curricula: the preprimary school education curriculum did not use as base for primary education curriculum so that there is no continuity in that grade one level education does not seem to base on the preschool education curriculum and experiences. The preschool education did not act as proper base for future life of children for the reason that contents of preschool education are not arranged in such a way they contribute for the future life of the child and the society at large.

- The presence of different expectations from different concerned bodies: for many people, the preschool education is not considered as the first level of education rather it is considered as a place for simply making children to stay for certain time in their early days. Contrary to this, some parents have an intention for their children to learn

different subjects at preschool level like higher grade learners. The intention differences from people create sort of obstacle for practice.

3.4.2. The measures for making the ECCE curriculum relevant for children

Some of the measures to alleviate the problems were also explored through interviews with preschool teachers and trainers. The results are communicated as follows under two headings. The measures in making the curriculum appropriate for children of different age levels include: 1) bringing changes in attitude and creating awareness about responsibility of concerned bodies and 2) modification or changes of curriculum materials. These measures could help in making the curriculum more suitable for practice in line with the developmental levels of the learners if they are given due consideration in the future practice.

1. Creating the awareness of responsible bodies: The preschool education curriculum is challenged by lack of proper awareness about the nature of the program from concerned bodies. Change in the awareness of different concerned bodies as to the nature of ECCE, especially of curriculum developers, implementer, parents and school management for the fact that they try to gear preschool education in line with the standard of grade level schooling. Besides, the absence of responsible body for the curriculum development is the other Problems observed in relation to preschool education.

2. Developing Curriculum Materials for proper practice: The ministry of education tried to contribute its parts for preschool education syllabus development. But, as it is learned from interview and documents that due attention was not given for the preparation of other curriculum materials for the preschool education in the country. This is evidenced in that except the syllabus and a guiding material for inspection of the quality of preschool education, no other additional materials was prepared by MOE that can serve for preschoolers. The supplemental materials for the syllabus were prepared by NGO- School Readiness Initiative with Action Aids in collaboration with REB.

4. Discussion

In studying the “preprimary school Education Curriculum in Ethiopia focusing on its Foundations, Objectives and Guiding Principles”, data were collected from preschool teachers and documents using different data collection tools (as documentary analysis, questionnaires of the rating scale type with open-ended questions, and interview). On the bases of the data collected using the different data collection tools, it was tried to find out answer for the basic research questions of the study that have been pointed out in the result part above. The discussion of the results can be put as follows briefly.

Regarding the foundations of preschool curriculum, as indicated in the result part, the preprimary school education syllabus includes the philosophical, psychological and sociological foundations but these foundational bases did not clearly stated at the expected level for use. The ideas communicated as foundations are so shallow to use as base for practice and the points included were not properly touching all foundational bases of curriculum development. Though the syllabus has the Philosophical base for ECCE in Ethiopia, the ideas about philosophical foundations were limited to use as base to organize and then practice the ECCE. Similarly, limited ideas were also indicated in

the syllabus about sociological and psychological bases. But, the syllabus did not indicate the historical and technological bases for ECCE. Thus, in the syllabus, historical foundations and technological changes were not totally communicated for curriculum practice of the given level of schooling in Ethiopia.

Regarding the objectives in the preschool curriculum, as observed in the second part of the result section, the syllabus did not include the different developmental aspects objectives for children to become base for developing them as full-fledged future citizens. The targets of preschool education like learning how to learn, developing personal qualities as Ethiopian children were not clearly aired out in the syllabus for the given schooling level. On top of this, the targets of developing cultural values and indigenous knowledge of the society were not included in preschool education curriculum of Ethiopia. So, the basic elements that help children to become successful in their learning at schools like developing the habit of working at the level of one's capability, respecting, loving, and helping others and working in cooperation with others and similar human qualities as trust, responsibility, honesty, truthfulness are not properly and clearly touched even in the detailed developmental activities in preprimary school education syllabus. So, the necessary human qualities that target at behavioral, personality, moral, ethical, spiritual, art and aesthetics aspects of development are not clearly and separately indicated in the syllabus for preschool education. Thus, the objectives for preschool education in Ethiopia did not seem comprehensive enough for they did not target at all aspects of development in balanced way. Besides, the objectives in the five thematic areas for preschool education were not stated at expected levels of clarity to use for teachers of the given schooling level in the syllabus. The ideas communicated seem so shallow for the teachers to use for practice and did not properly represent all developmental areas. On top of this, the Objectives in the syllabus were not written in terms of students' Performance rather they are written in terms of teachers' activities. So, the curriculum for preprimary school education seems in lack of comprehensive objectives as bases for use so that the relevance of the curriculum in terms of objectives for children of the given level seems under question mark.

Regarding the consideration of principles in the development of the preprimary school education curriculum, as learned from the third section of the result part, the guiding principles of child development and learning were not considered at the expected high levels in making the curriculum fit for the needs of children for the fact that, in all cases, reasonably high percentage of respondents rated the incorporation of the principles in preparing the curriculum at medium or below levels. Taking the average of the scores, about 44.6% of the respondents reported that the different principles of learning and development are not properly considered in the preschool education curriculum preparation. Thus, it is clearly understood from the sums of all scores that the basic principles of child development and learning were not properly considered in the preparation of the Ethiopian preschool education curriculum due to the reason that only medium but not high percentages of respondents reported the consideration of the principles in curriculum practice for children. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the preparation and implementation of preschool curriculum did not properly take in to account the basic principles of development and learning for the reason that the highest and needed percentage levels of respondents were not reporting the consideration of the principles in the preparation of the curriculum. For the reason that the guiding

principles of child development and learning are not considered in the preparation of the curriculum at expected high level, the curriculum for the preschoolers has undeniable gap in satisfying properly the developmental needs of children at the different age levels. The curriculum preparation and then its practice become appropriate if the basic principles of learning and development of children are taken in to account at the highest level in its design, preparation, implementation and evaluation in Ethiopia and then throughout the world.

Regarding the problems observed in the preparation of the preschool curriculum, the prevailing problems for making the curriculum relevant for children include problem related to the benchmarks in curriculum development , limited contents in the curriculum materials for preschoolers, absence of responsible organ in the curriculum material preparation process , limited curriculum materials for practice and other pitfalls like lack of continuity/bridge between preprimary and primary education curricula to prepare children for life, and the presence of different expectation from different concerned bodies in the implementation of the ECCE curriculum as well as problem related to representation of disabilities and cultures .

As it is learned from the documents and interviews with professionals like trainers, the experiences used as a base for the preparation of curriculum for Ethiopian children were taken from abroad. In line with this, as commented by the professionals, the experiences taken from the benchmarking countries did not seem the best representative for the contexts of Ethiopia. The curriculum materials prepared on the bases of experience taken from developed countries might not be typical bases for preparing curriculum for preschool children of developing countries like Ethiopia. The representativeness of the benchmarking countries could be the type that is questioned as to their similarity with the Ethiopian reality. Besides, the ECCE Curriculum has targeted at only on limited domains of child development contents that may not reflect the reality of children in the context of the different settings where children are found.

In the previous time, the task of curriculum materials preparation was facilitated by an institute working for curriculum development and research called “Institute for Curriculum Development and Research (ICDR)”. The achievement of the institute was advertised by various people and concerned bodies as the best model in providing experience even for other countries in African and beyond. The curriculum preparation process for preprimary school education and the next levels of schooling, however, could not be successful without the involvement of such type of institute that is highly responsible for the curriculum development work. But, in recent years, curriculum development has been done without the involvement of responsible organ like ICDR. Thus, the curriculum preparation process could not be as successful as it was organized by ICDR for it missed the responsible body that facilitates the preparation of relevant and quality curriculum. It is questioned by many educators now and then that quality curriculum could not be prepared without responsible organ for its development that is also true for the preparation of the preschool curriculum.

It was found that the syllabus is the only material for teachers to teach in the preprimary school of Ethiopia. Thus, guiding, teaching and coaching children using syllabus as the only material at preschool creates burden for teachers in achieving objectives to bring the contents at the ground level and in preparing plan and additional materials for daily programs. The preparation of curriculum materials for practice using

the syllabus is undoubtedly burden for teachers and uniformity is not kept in the delivery of preschool education. Thus, this leads to the use of different materials at different preschools of the country for the reason that the syllabus and the limited supplemental materials cannot be used as they are for use. In doing all the different activities in the preschools, the syllabus and the supplemental materials did not properly guide preschool teachers. So, teacher's friendly guide and proper text books for children are very essential for the program to keep the uniformity and to reduce redundancy of lessons at the different age levels in the preschools. Besides, the curriculum for preschoolers is commented in that it is associated with problems like lack concrete bases due to different expectations from different persons and it is also criticized in that it misses children with disabilities and multiculturalism issues rather it is mainly focusing on academics for the long and even now. Besides, the continuity of preschool and primary school education seems in problem for the reason that preschool completer faces difficulty in coping up with education given at grade one.

Thus, to make the preschool education curriculum appropriate for children in the future, it is necessary to bring changes in the awareness of concerned bodies including the society/community towards preschool education. Moreover, the preschool education needs responsible body for every activities starting from curriculum preparation up to the creation of a bridge for its connection with primary school education. Thus, for the appropriateness of the preschool education for children's life, there should be responsible body for curriculum preparation and the continuity of pre-schools and primary schools education should be thought in the future. So, preschool education should not be left for a few citizens rather should be the agenda of all citizens and/ or the government that represents the population of the nation. This is for the reason that preschool education seems the only responsibility of a few persons till recently especially in the preparation of materials. The government represented by MOE should play a pivotal role in the development of curriculum for ECCE for the enhancement of preschool education. This is for the reason that the work of the MOE does not seem as expected in preparing appropriate curriculum for the different age levels children of Ethiopia. Thus, MOE should further go ahead in preparing student text, appropriate teacher's guide that enable preschool teachers to have a teacher friendly guide in teaching or coaching preschool children in uniform way throughout the country. Therefore, the preschool education should not be left for a few citizens or organizations who feel responsibility for the futurity of the kids and then the country. The ministry of education should work in cooperation with the concerned bodies and other organizations.

5. Conclusions

The preschool curriculum can be made relevant for the children by taking in to account the following points in the future.

- The preschool curriculum development should consider all possible perspectives to make it fit for children of different ages and uniqueness within their social and cultural context in the future at very high level. This can be possible as far as the foundational bases, comprehensiveness of objectives, and the standard guiding principles of child development and learning of the international experiences of the preschool curriculum development are considered in the preparation of preschool curriculum of the country.

- The only material available in many preschools is the syllabus. Besides, teachers' guide and student text should be prepared to be used for all age levels for the uniformity of education at all pre-schools of the country. It is also highly advisable to create connection between preschool and primary school education in that either by revising the preprimary school education in line with the curriculum of grade one in that making age 5-6 syllabus as starting point for education of grade one.
- Different concerned bodies should take their responsibility for the betterment of the future preschool curriculum. Mainly, Ministry of Education (MOE) should take the mandate in preparing guide and books for the preschool education. This is for the fact that MOE is not properly engaged in the preparation of a guide or a book for the preschool education except syllabus and policy till recently. Preschool education materials were prepared by the initiative of individuals with the support of NGO. But, the MOE is also expected to work in collaboration with the NGO-in developing the materials for preschool education.
- Ministry of education should think the assignment of responsible body for curriculum preparation either by reorganizing the "Institute for Curriculum Development and Research (ICDR)" or organizing other similar institute for the betterment of the future Ethiopian education including preschool education.
- Other studies should be conducted in the future focusing on the other components like process and experiences of the curriculum planning in trying to investigate the relevance of preschool curriculum for the preschoolers of Ethiopia.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire for preprimary school teachers

Addis Ababa University
School of graduate studies

Department of curriculum and instruction

Questionnaire to be filled by preprimary school teachers

This questionnaire uses to collect data about preprimary school education curriculum to study whether the curriculum/syllabus is prepared considering the basic principles of development and learning to make the curriculum appropriate for the development and learning of the early childhood period children to conduct study on the title “**The preprimary school education curriculum in Ethiopia: Foundations, Objectives and Guiding principles**”. Thus, the study has the goal of airing out the relevance of the curriculum and its practices for the preschoolers Please attempt all the questions and your response to all items in the questionnaire contributes to the success of the research. So, you are kindly requested to provide your answer with full heartedly and genuinely for the success of this research. Your answers will be kept confidential. Please do not write your name or any other identifiers on the questionnaire.

Thank you for your time!

A. Back ground Information

Directions: For each of the statements (questions) below, please put tick mark (v) in the box corresponding to the appropriate information about you.

1. Sex: Male Female
2. Your Work Experience = Less than 5 years 5 - 10 years more than10 years

B. Scale about preschool curriculum

1. Statements about the principles of child development and learning

Directions: There are twelve guiding principles of child development and learning that should be considered in preparing appropriate curriculum that fits for developmental needs of preschool children. The principles are listed as statement below. So, indicate to what extent the principles are considered in the preparation of preprimary school curriculum of Ethiopia by encircling the number (ranging from 5 it is considered at very high level to 1 it is considered at negligible level) that corresponds to the statements.

I.	To what extent does the ECCE curriculum take in to account the principles listed below?	at very high	at reas ona	at aver age	at low	at negligibl e
1	The ECCE curriculum addresses that development and learning of children ----					
1.	consider all developmental areas as important to create whole child	5	4	3	2	1
2.	follow sequential process with clearly stated objectives	5	4	3	2	1
3.	proceed at varying rates for each child	5	4	3	2	1
4.	result from the interaction of maturation and experience.	5	4	3	2	1
5.	are profoundly affected by early experiences.	5	4	3	2	1
6.	proceed toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic capacities.	5	4	3	2	1
7	occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts	5	4	3	2	1
8	advance when children are challenged with meaningful contents.	5	4	3	2	1
9	happen in a variety of ways using the different senses .	5	4	3	2	1
10	occur at best when they have secured relations with others.	5	4	3	2	1
11	enhance experience to shape their motivation and learning approaches	5	4	3	2	1
12	promote self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence using play	5	4	3	2	1

1. Please state your overall judgment /comment about the objectives and contents of Ethiopian preschool curriculum. _____

Appendix B: Interview Question

Addis Ababa University
School of graduate studies

Department of curriculum and instruction

Interview Questions about ECCE Curriculum and its Practice

1. As preprimary school teachers, have you tried to make instruction developmentally appropriate for children? To what extent you make the practice developmentally appropriate?

2. As preprimary school teachers, does the preprimary school curriculum allow you apply developmentally appropriate practice?

3. Are there other factors that limit you from practicing developmentally appropriate teaching for children?

4 Please list down the major factors that you think affect the implementation of the ECCE curriculum in your school.

Internal/school factors _____

External factors _____

5. In what ways do you think we can improve the current relevance of preschool education practices? Please state your suggestions for improvement

6. What are the basic strategies that teachers use to help children learn at different levels of preschools?

a. For 3-4 age children

b. For 4-5 age children

c. For 5-6 age children

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