

Relevance Of "O" Class Curriculum In Ethiopia And Its Implication For Early Childhood Care And Education Teacher Training

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Abstract: This study was aimed at the investigation of the relevance of "O" class curriculum in Ethiopia. Its implications for early childhood care and education teacher education was stressed. Descriptive survey approach was employed as a quantitative research design. Moreover, four regional states randomly selected were involved in the study. Document review was the main data gathering tool in the study. Findings from the study reveal that even though Ethiopian "O" class curriculum is somehow relevant for young children attending the program, still it requires further improvement. It was evident that the Ethiopian "O" class teaches children of age 6 through child-centered pedagogy. Hence; the researcher recommends that Early Childhood Care and Education Teacher Training should align with the "O" class curriculum. For program betterment, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education has to consult and involve an ECCE professionals in the further process of policy design and development.

Keywords: "O" Class, Early Childhood, Teacher Education, Curriculum, Relevance

1. Introduction

Different studies reveal that learning is a behavior of human nature. Being literate is just like being rich because living is believed as a result of relatively permanent change in behavior which is learning. Learning during early years is like putting well designed foundation for the newly constructed building. In the human life cycle, the early childhood period is a critical period that requires due attention and a great deal of investment. It sets the foundation for life and has enormous impact on children's readiness for primary school. Failing to provide children at this stage of development with better nutrition, health care and education deprives them of their right to develop as productive citizens, enjoy a better-quality life and contribution to society's growth (UNESCO, 2015). Early childhood care and education is one of the inputs to the overall improvement of the quality of education. It leads to the reduction of drop out and repetition, and higher enrolment in primary education, particularly for girls (bed rock of education). This in turn contributes to the overarching Sustainable Development Goal of reducing poverty and providing education for all, (Save the children, 2018). Dereje D, (2018), in his study discusses that human development starts immediately after conception and learning takes place as early as possible. Development during this time is extremely fast when compared with later years. Immediate changes in all aspects of human development are highly observable during the first six years of life. Language development reaches maximum level before the age six. Language especially first language development begins before birth. Listening skill is believed to happen while the unborn baby is seven months old. Physical development is incomparable during the first early years in human development. Changes can be observed and measured in each day and week. A child seen before a month ago, may show a significant change in height, weight, size, shape, color, beauty and voice. According to UNICEF, (2012) children during early childhood period are socially active. They are eager to act in the surrounding environment in

which they live. They like to experiment, test, ask, touch and move around the nature. They always gear themselves towards the new thing they find. Some of the characteristics of young children are playing, feeling free, experimentation, questioning, interacting with each other and etc. This shows early years in human development requires stimulation and care. So, this a legal foundation for young children is getting highly emphasized across the world. It is a human right issue and children are expected to transit to primary education through the program. To see child developed holistically, early exposure to play, interactive environment and education is mandatory. In this view, Ethiopia has a very short history of early childhood education program. There was no government owned full package early childhood care and education program until the last few years. It was totally forgotten in government programs and given for private sectors as a source of business.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

If early childhood is corrupted and not well managed, it creates a corrupted society in the future. Ethiopia is considered the importance of early childhood care and education program for the generation. After long time delay, now days the program named "O" class is running as an emergency early childhood care and education package in Ethiopia. It was started before around 2010 G.C by the FDRE government initiation. As the program is new and it is not well justified. The curriculum developed for the program is getting implemented among the government owned preschools. However, there is no clear understanding about the relevance of this special program among the preschools owned by the government. Therefore; the researcher is initiated to test the extent that "O" class is relevant for the children engaged in the program. Therefore; this study was intended to investigate the insight of "O" class program implementation in Ethiopia in light of the early childhood care and education program nature.

1.2. Basic Research Questions

Based on the statement of the problem discussed above, the basic research questions raised are;

1. What is the current practice of “O” class program in Ethiopia in light of early childhood care and education nature?
2. Is there any difference between “O” class program and primary education in Ethiopia?
3. What extent does “O” class program prepare young children for primary education in Ethiopia?
4. Is “O” class program relevant for young children involved in it?

1.3. Objective of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore the relevance of “O” class program for children in Ethiopia.

1.3.1. Specific Objectives

Specifically, this study was intended to;

- Assess the current practice of “O” class program in Ethiopia in light of early childhood care and education nature.
- Realize if there is any difference between “O” class program and primary education in Ethiopia.
- Evaluate the extent of “O” class program in preparing young children for primary education in Ethiopia.
- Describe the relevance of “O” class program for young children involved in it.

1.3.2. Significance of the Study

This study was believed to promote the right understanding among “O” classes in Ethiopia just by creating awareness, and promoting good practices. Moreover,

- ✓ It may initiate alliance among teachers and other concerned bodies among Ethiopian preschools.
- ✓ It also mobilizes all responsible bodies in the country to bring significant change in implementation preschool education.
- ✓ Other experts can also use it as a supplementary material for their further study in the area.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Early Childhood Education

It is common for educators of young children to use the terms early childhood, early childhood education, and early education interchangeably. The text follows this practice. Early childhood education refers to the programs and settings that serve young children from birth through the eighth year of life (Queensland Government, 2005). Children receiving early education may attend drop-in, half-day, full-day, and before- and afterschool programs that are publicly or privately funded in family child-care homes, churches, child-care centers, schools, and other community settings. The actual number of young children enrolled in group education experiences is rising. The Children’s Defense Fund research (1998) tells that approximately 30 percent of mothers with children under age 6 were in the work force, as were more than 50 percent of mothers of school-age children. By now these percentages had grown to 65% and 77% respectively.

Every day 13 million children—including 6 million infants and toddlers—are in child care.

2.2. Historical Development of ECCE and O class program

2.2.1. ECCE in Global Context

During the 15th century, the medieval period was drawing to a close and the Renaissance was beginning to spread across Europe. During Medieval times, the Christian church dominated all aspects of life, including schools and systems for educating children. Childhood was not recognized as a unique period of life until the end of the 15th century. In fact, once children developed past infancy they were considered to be miniature adults. In the society of the 15th century, there was a clearly defined class system in which the privileged classes-maintained power and control over commoners or peasants. Children of the upper classes were often provided with educational opportunities through study with a tutor or in schools in the homes of prominent families. Middle-class children left home for vocational apprenticeship, and poorer children often had to go to the streets to work (Save the children, 2016). According to Essa, Eva. L. (2007), the Renaissance during the 15th and 16th centuries was important to education because of achievements in the arts and literature and scientific advances that eventually influenced how children were educated. For example, the introduction of the symbol of zero, the current symbols used in algebra, and the publication of the heliocentric theory by Copernicus all contributed to the expansion of education in Europe. During this time period, there was little, if any, attention paid to the education of young children. Those children who did receive an education were from the more privileged economic class. Younger children were considered expendable because of high rates of infant and child mortality. Girls were rarely provided with the same opportunities and experiences that were available to boys. The positive effects of ECCE programs on school readiness, academic progress and psychosocial well-being have been documented in hundreds of research studies since the 1960s and in dozens of research syntheses. The dynamic feature of human capital accumulation (new skills building on already acquired skills) has implications for how investments in human skills can most efficiently be distributed over the life cycle. Early childhood is the most effective and cost-efficient time to ensure that all children develop their full potential, by preventing negative impacts of deprivations during the most formative life-phase as well by positively strengthening young children’s capacities. The returns on investment in ECCE are substantial (Mac Naughton, Glenda, 2003).

2.2.2. ECCE in Ethiopia

The Ethiopia has recognized the fundamental importance of Early Childhood Education (ECCE) in accelerating attainment of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals. The Government of Ethiopia is very much aware of the value of ECCE. This document presents a comprehensive overarching policy framework that encompasses sector policies for early childhood care and education services and programs in Ethiopia for children from prenatal to seven years. It provides a frame

of reference for key sectors involved in the provision of services for infants and young children (MoE, 2018). It is expected to form a springboard from which other sector policies will be strengthened, developed or reviewed, particularly in the areas of health and nutrition, education, water, sanitation, and social services. These sector policies are crucial in providing standards and guidelines for ensuring provision of quality services for all children in their earliest years of life. The bases for the ECCE policy framework are the National Education and Training Policy, the National Health Policy, National Nutrition Strategy and the National Policy and Legal Framework on Child Rights, (NPF for ECCE, 2010). Although the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is fundamental for developing basic learning attitudes and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of primary education, it had been mainly left in Ethiopia to non-governmental organization and communities until very recently. At present the number of practitioners for early childhood care and education (ECCE) remains low for the fact that preschool pre-service teacher training has been conducted by few numbers of government teacher training colleges. "The trainees in government owned pre-primary teacher education colleges get ten-month certificate training; while training at the private preschool teachers training institutes train preschool teachers for between three to ten months" (UNESCO: Country-Case Study on ECCE in selected Sub-Saharan African countries 2007/2008' p.13). The summary report inferred the existence of various training programs, modalities, standards, and contents of training. In Ethiopia, government has paid consideration to advance the ECCE program and practices as is described in major documents such as the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP), ECCE Strategic Policy, and the two Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP I & II). Accordingly, ECCE is seen as a component of a comprehensive services program for young children. The Ethiopian Education and Training policy (ETP, 1994) stresses kindergartens to "focus on all round development of the child in preparation for formal schooling" (p. 14). The policy also states that "teachers starting from kindergarten to higher education will be required to have the necessary teaching qualification and competency in the media of instruction through and in-service training" (MoE, 2018). Further, as the policy establishes, "the language of teacher training for kindergarten and primary education will be the nationality language used in the area" (p. 23). The policy also guarantees private individuals, non-governmental organizations, and the community to run ECCE programs that can reduce the demands on the government's scarce budgets and provide services for the society. The major roles of the government include: policy and curriculum development, standard setting, controlling and evaluating, training of teachers, and supervision to improve the quality of services rendered to children in ECCE program. Based on MoE, 2010, in line with this, target was set in the GTP with the objectives of increasing access to preschool children for the achievement of the MDGs. Having a 6.9% baseline for kindergarten enrollment rate in 2009/10, the targets set forth with the intention to achieve 14.7% in 2012/13 and 20% in the year 2014/2015, as stated in Growth and Transformation Plan (2010/11-2014/2015; Volume II: Policy matrix, p.19). With regard

to the actual enrollment, out of the estimated 7.71 million children of the appropriate age group, about 2.01 million children have been reported to have access to pre-primary education as indicated in MoE, Education Statistics Annual Abstract (2012/13). Though the enrollment is small when compared to the appropriate age group, gross enrollment rate which is 26.1% is higher than the previous years. Such an increase of enrollment requires the preparation of adequate number and qualified preschool teachers. Though, the policy ascertains that formal education in the country begins at ECCE level, successfully implementing the policy to meet the desired educational objectives remained a great challenge. ECCE had not received due attention and support it deserves from ESDP I- III (NCP, 2017). In ESDP IV, taking into account the fundamental importance of ECCE in accelerating attainment of Education For All and the Millennium Development Goals, the government of Ethiopia had developed ECCE policy framework in line with the Education and Training Policy, the National Health Policy, National Nutrition Strategy and policy and Legal Framework on Child Rights (MoE, 2010). The vision of the national policy framework is "to ensure all children have the right to a healthy start in life, be nurtured in a safe, caring and stimulating environment and develop to their fullest potential." One of the major principles of the policy framework is equitable access to quality early childhood care and education for all. Besides, ESDP V prioritized in the Strategic Operational Plan and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education in Ethiopia, increased access to and equity in ECCE service provision and enhanced quality of ECCE service as the two major strategic issues. In GTP II, Ethiopian government realized its plan to achieve access and equity of ECCE from 49% in 2015 to 80% for children of age 4 to 6 in 2020 (NCP, 2017; MoE, 2016). Further, the government has also been committed to address the issue of children's early years education through expanding not only kindergartens but also by offering educational opportunity in the formal primary school classrooms named as "O" class, child to child, and accelerated school modalities. As a result, the Gross Enrollment Rate for ECCE children reached as high as 49 % (NCP, 2017). However, increased access to ECCE raised the issue of the quality of education offered to children.

2.3. The nature of "O" class program

Early childhood care and education is a matter of global agenda now days. Ethiopia also accepted different conventions with regard to it. Care and education for young children are listed as a right issue in human development in these years. Historically, early childhood care and education was started as early as the emergence of modern education in Ethiopia. Studies reveal that during 1908 E.C, the first preschool was built for France diplomats around Diredawa. Then, it was practiced by the private sector until the re-emergence of the program since 2003 E.C. One of the challenges during that time was to allocating budget, have lunch, and etc. O class is an alternative early childhood care and education package in Ethiopia. This program is designed for the young children aged 6 therefore; it is equivalent to upper kindergarten. It

focuses on teaching children how to carry the water container and the like.

2.4. Early Childhood Care and Education vs. O class Curriculum

Curriculum is a series of planned, systematic learning experiences organized around a particular philosophy of education. Although curriculum models vary, they each provide a framework to guide program implementation and evaluation. Variations among curriculum models reflect differences in values concerning what is important for young children to learn, as well as in the process by which children are believed to learn and develop (Dereje D. 2018). The type of curriculum used in an early childhood program must be based upon sound principles of child development, program philosophy, developmental appropriateness and the needs of the children in the program. Curriculum models are essential in determining the program content, as well as in training and supervising staff to implement high-quality programs. In order to provide preschool programs of the highest quality, it is important that programs adopt a research-based curriculum model. The following are current curriculum models with validated research.

Creative Curriculum - used by Head Start, child care, preschool, prekindergarten and KG program.

- Focuses on ten interest areas or activities in the program environment: blocks, house corner, table toys, art, sand and water, library corner, music and movement, cooking, computers, and the outdoors.
- Helps teachers understand how to work with children at different developmental levels to promote learning.
- Guides teachers in adapting the environment to make it more challenging.
- Includes a parent component.
- Training manuals and audiovisual resources are available.

High/Scope preschool approach - used in both public and private half- and full-day preschools, nursery schools, Head Start programs, child care centers, home-based child care programs, and programs for children with special needs.

- Based on the fundamental premise that children are active learners who learn best from activities that they plan, carry out, and reflect on.
- Fifty-eight key experiences in child development for the preschool years are identified.
- These key experiences are grouped into ten categories: creative representation, language and literacy, initiative and social relations, movement, music, classification, seriation, number, space, and time.
- A central element of the day is the “plan-do-review sequence” in which children plan, carry it out, and then reflect on the results.
- The daily routine also includes times for small and large group experiences and time for outside play.

Montessori – based on the work and writings of the Italian physician Maria Montessori. Her method appears

to be the first curriculum model for children of preschool age that was widely disseminated and replicated.

- Based on the idea that children teach themselves through their own experiences.
- Provides a carefully prepared and ordered environment.
- Included in this environment are didactic and sequenced materials geared toward promoting children’s education in four areas: development of the senses, conceptual or academic development, competence in practical life activities, and character development.
- Materials proceed from the simple to the complex and from the concrete to the abstract.
- Sixty-three percent of class time is spent in independent activity.

Project Approach - based on recent research about how children learn and the value of integrating the curriculum.

- A project is an in-depth investigation of a specific topic with the main goal of finding out more about the topic rather than to seek answers to questions proposed by the teacher.
- Either the children or teacher can generate the topic.
- The questions to be addressed and investigated during the project are generated and developed by the children.
- Project work should not constitute the whole curriculum but should address the more informal parts of the curriculum.
- The project approach is similar to themes and units but themes usually consist of preplanned lessons and activities on particular topics selected by the teacher rather than the child.

Reggio Emilia - emphasizes the involvement of children, staff, and parents in the learning experience.

- Emergent Curriculum: An emergent curriculum is one that builds upon the interests of children. Teachers work together to formulate hypotheses about the possible directions of a project, the materials needed, and possible parent and/or community support and involvement.
- Representational Development: Similar to the idea of teaching through the use of multiple intelligences, the Reggio Emilia approach calls for the integration of the graphic arts as tools for cognitive, linguistic, and social development.
- Collaboration: Collaborative group work, both large and small, is considered valuable and necessary to advance cognitive development. Children are encouraged to dialogue, critique, compare, negotiate, hypothesize, and problem solve through group work.
- Teachers as Researchers: Working as a member of a teaching team, the role of the teacher is that of a learner alongside the children. The teacher is a facilitator and resource.
- Documentation: Similar to the use of a portfolio, documentation of children’s work in progress is viewed as an important tool in the learning process for children, teachers, and parents.
- Environment: Within the Reggio Emilia schools, great attention is given to the look and feel of the

classroom. The environment is considered an important and essential component of the learning process.

Theme-Based Model - The recent brain research emphasizes the importance of forming patterns and helping children understand the connections to learning. Patterning information means really organizing and associating new information with previously developed mental hooks. A theme-based model encourages children to form those patterns.

- A theme is an idea or topic that a teacher and children can explore in many different ways.
- The theme is often based on the learners' culture, environment or shared experiences.
- Themes should arise from the kinds of events that take place in the classroom on a daily basis.
- Children should be involved in the planning stages.
- Teachers can integrate literacy, social studies, math, music and art.
- Themes work best when the teacher considers the total needs of the children and uses the themes to invite new learning.
- Themes should be custom-designed to fit the teacher and the children.

Adapted with permission from: Michigan State Department of Education. (2005). Preschool curriculum models. Retrieved March 9, 2007, from <http://www.michigan.gov/greatstart>

2.5. Feature of "O" Class Program

"O" class program is a program directly copied from the kindergarten frame. It has a very little difference in nature and application. Some of significant features of "O" class program are discussed as follows.

2.5.1. Content

"O" class program has all integrated contents that stick on five different learning keys each. They are presented below.

- A. **Early Literacy** – this is an emergent literacy that emphasizes the development of pre-reading and pre-writing. It has five learning keys such as knowing books, sound recognition, letter understanding, and the like.
- B. **Early Numeracy** – is an emergent mathematics that has a significant role in mathematical concepts foundation. It also consists five basic learning keys namely number and counting, geometry, pattern, measurement and comparison, as well as sorting and classification.
- C. **Creativity** – is a focus area in "O" class program. It is believed to sustain children's capacity of creativity through hands-on activities.
- D. **Environmental Understanding** – here children are forced to get familiar with their environment like police station, market, family, body parts, living and non-living things, man-made and natural phenomena, wild and domestic animals and plants too.

2.6. Importance of Early Childhood Care and Education Program

A famous paradigm of the 21st century science is the developmental origin of health and disease, which underscores on the high significance of early years of life to the health and wellbeing of human beings. Apart from the developmental health aspect, similar insights have also pointed out the significant bearings' early life educational conditions and exposures have on cognition and creativity. As unraveled from multifarious global research, the stage from birth to eight years has been deemed as the foundation phase for human development greatly impacting children's cognitive skills, emotional wellbeing, social competence, and physical and mental health. Mainstreaming ECCE program in our day-to-day endeavors and education system via integration of preschool education centers will undoubtedly pave the way to foster better child creativity as well as to enhance different areas of the multiple intelligence concepts. This experience also has its own impact on young children's convergent, divergent and critical thinking skills. Besides, experiences derived therein are believed to spark curiosity and imagination in the children (considered as a catalyst to cultivate young children creativity and critical thinking), and in turn ascertains the realization of positive learning outcomes (Mosiman, R & Mosiman, M., 2009). Similarly, it has been verified via research that positive achievement and future economic productivity are merely a reflection of the genetic makeup of the child as well as external conditions during the early years of development. At birth the child has 100 billion brain cells. The growth of these cells is contingent up on the child's early experience and stimulation, and they can even multiply into trillions of cells if the child is exposed to positive learning experiences (have new connections or experiences during early years) during this early and critical phase. This however cannot be attributed to one area of experience, but is rather a combination of a multitude of experiences like language skills, literacy, reasoning skills, verbalizing, imagination, numeracy, social competencies skills, self-regulation, moral orientation, and fine and gross motor skills. Such experiences serve as a platform for young children to foster trillion brain cells which will be the permanent quality of the children. An inability to have early years' experience in these areas would pave a way to disuse atrophy of the original 100 brain cells (Harvard Developing Child, 2007). It is further confirmed that children's brains at the age of two and half years reaches 50% of the adult's brain weight, and at the age of five, their brains will equal to around 90% of that of the adult. As research has further confirmed, brain development is so fast within the first five years that such early interventions will have huge impact on children's later learning skills and development. This in turn requires an involvement of a multitude of different actors like teachers, the community, education experts, and parents. Having a program that integrates all the above requirements is anticipated to make the children ready for later schools, as well as serve as a means to address quality of education in general. This claim is more supported by Robert Ehrlich as it is presented below. Experts tell us that 90% of all brain development occurs by the age of five. If we don't begin thinking about education in the early years, our children are at risk of

falling behind by the time they start Kindergarten. Such realizations have generated immense interest in the field of child development and education. Accordingly, the provisions of early childhood care and education in the organized institutions have gained a wide recognition that provides desirable educational experiences for ECCE children. ECCE has a very positive impact on the social, physical, emotional and intellectual development of young children that lasts well into adulthood. It fosters emotional strength, enhances positive self-concept, and increases intellectual ability and physical wellbeing of children (Blacker A., 2002). Children who have had the benefit of ECCE experience are in a better position in the formal schooling; their educational achievement tends to improve, the charges of dropping out of school are reduced, and stand better-adjusted in primary school (Nicolas P. 2003). Children who have had ECCE education had higher earnings, higher home ownership, more schooling, less social support, fewer arrests and fewer special education placements. Above all, it lays a firm foundation for children who are the future citizens of the country to benefit themselves, their parents, and the society at large. As a result, ECCE has become a point of common concern in both developed and developing countries (Nicolas P. 2003).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the relevance of “O” class curriculum for Ethiopian preschools. In order to accomplish this study, the researcher used quantitative research design. Specifically, document analysis approach was used to realize the relevance of the curriculum.

3.2. Study Area

This study was conducted in light of 4 of 12 administrative regions in Ethiopia. It was administered based on randomly selected regions such as SNNPR, Amhara, Oromia and Benshangul Gumuz. There was one sample curriculum material which was prepared by federal ministry of education. Region representation was formed based on 10% sampling principle. The curriculum was focused based on the government intention on the program.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The researcher used document analysis to gather data. Curriculum documents assumed to be important for the study were collected and critically reviewed. All data discussed here in the document are analyzed in light of the curriculum models recognized internationally. Four documents prepared in four local languages were collected from the regions selected.

3.4. Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data was collected through document analysis via percentages, and frequency. The frequency and percentage score were utilized to analyze and describe the extent to which the curriculum is relevant. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze data in the study.

3.5. Ethical Consideration

The researcher provided letter of consent for the regions included in the study. It helped them to decide whether they take part or not. They were asked to participate voluntarily. Regions were informed that even information documents provide would be disclosed directly based on their negotiation.

4. Data Analysis & Interpretation

This survey study was conducted based on the evidence described below. Here are some of criteria employed to see the insight of “O” class curriculum in Ethiopia.

4.1. Contents Planned to be Taught

Based on the curriculum models discussed above, “O” class content to be taught in Ethiopian preschools are critically reviewed as stated in the table below.

Table 1: O class Content Evaluation Checklist

S/N	Criteria	Level of Indication		
		1	2	3
1.	English is suggested to be taught as a one subject.	x		
2.	Promotes sophisticated mathematics concepts.	x		
3.	All subjects are taught as a one subject matter.	x		
4.	Does not give emphasis for creative activities.	x		
5.	It doesn't show concern for environmental understanding.		x	
6.	It doesn't allow mother tongue language education.		x	

As it was indicated in the table above (Table 1), Ethiopian “O” class program curriculum relevance for young children is seen in light of internationally recognized curriculum models such as Reggio Emilia and Maria Montessori. In the table above, mean = 1.33 shows there is something planned to make the curriculum integrated however it was designed in a way that specific subject matters are to be taught. Again, the standard deviation = 0.003 also confirms that there is no significant evidence to decide whether the curriculum is relevant or not. English is one of the subjects taught in the program. There were highly sophisticated mathematics concepts to be addressed in the program. Moreover, all learning contents in the program were not integrated that each of the subjects were stated as independent learning concepts. It was observed that there were no as such creative activities suggested for young children's exposure to learning. The table above indicates the “O” class curriculum initiates teachers to teach four and more subjects specially developed for the program. In the regions taken as sample, children play, learn and integrate using second language so called Amharic. Even though attempts were made to localize child learning approach, most of the administrative zones particularly under Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State were forced to use the sample learning materials prepared by the Ministry of Education.

4.2. Teaching Methods Suggested

Ethiopian “O” class program curriculum boldly discusses the teaching methods in preschools. Whereas, its relevance to the program has been tested based on the specific criteria listed below.

Table 2: O class curriculum pedagogy analysis

S/ N	Statements	Possible indicators					
		Y	%	N/A	%	N	%
1.	All activities in the curriculum encourage indoor play.	x	50	---	---	--	-
2.	Storytelling is one of the teaching methods in the program.	x	80	--	---	--	--
3.	“O” class curriculum emphasizes art and creative activities.	x	80	---	---	--	---
4.	There were outdoor activities that promote child learning.	x	60	---	---	--	---
5.	“O” class curriculum motivates children learn via discussion.	x	70	---	---	--	---
6.	It helps preschool teachers to generate songs and lyrics.	x	60	--	---	--	---
7.	Activities in the curriculum are highly practice oriented.	x	50	---	---	--	---

Based on the table above (Table 2), Ethiopian “O” class curriculum has different but not organized approaches to teaching. It was difficult to decide whether all the activities in the curriculum encourage indoor play or not. The curriculum was confident only 50% in inclusion of hands-on activities. On the other hands, 80% of the activities in the curriculum have valid evidence that shows how storytelling is important in child development and learning. Again, there is 60% confidence to confirm the curriculum comprises outdoor activities that promotes child development and learning. There were a lot of issues presented for discussion and conversation in the curriculum. It is about 70% true that in the curriculum, children were believed to discuss and talk to each other. Therefore; conversation card was one of the teaching methods suggested in the curriculum. In addition to this, there were opportunities given for preschool teachers to generate, and produce songs and lyrics as a method of child learning. In the curriculum, 60% of the information describes there was an open gate for teachers to use child-friendly songs and lyrics. The document gives less priority for practical activities. About half percent of the information in the curriculum document encourages child-play and hands-on activities.

4.3. Assessment Tools Recommended

Ethiopian “O” class curriculum has a very narrow space for child assessment. Lists assessment tools mentioned in the document were discussed below.

4.3.1. Written Test

In the curriculum document, there was no statement talks about the assessment techniques to be used in the program. Whereas, the teacher guide initiates teachers to use written test for the sake of child identification. The

experience of Ethiopian preschools is giving final examinations that can be used to grade young children’s academic achievement. Children are expected to take tests that may qualify them for the first grade according to the curriculum document. This shows children will be placed based on the average they scored in each subject like any grade level. Children will be certified finally to confirm that they are graduated from the program.

4.3.2. Questioning and Answering

A lot of the activities in the curriculum document are oral question oriented. It informs teachers to ask questions in each and every session that they are expected to check children’s understanding. Conversation card to be used as preschool teaching method in the program invites teachers to apply oral questions as a method of child-assessment. Teachers are forced to make roster, arrange children’s classroom rank and prepare family day at the end.

4.3.3. Learning Environment Mentioned

The curriculum document reviewed in this study reveals that preschools in Ethiopia have classrooms which are organized like primary grade classrooms. It does not give emphasis for corner development and organization. The curriculum document recommends that the size of the classroom for young children ranges from 55 to 63 square meter. Chairs and tables were also stated to be child-sized and made up of locally available materials. It suggests that there has to be field for outdoor play. Health and physical education is mentioned as one of the outdoor activities to be performed by the young children included in the program.

5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This part discusses mainly three issues. These are summary, conclusion and recommendations.

5.1. Summary

As it was stated earlier, this study was conducted in Ethiopia. The main aim of this research was to investigate the relevance of “O” class curriculum for young children. It was analyzed in light of the internationally recognized preschool curriculum such as Reggio Emilia, High Scope, Anti-biased and Montessori. Quantitative research design was employed so as to analyze the existing curriculum document. Descriptive survey was an approach to the study therefore; quantitative data gathered was analyzed in terms of percentage, mean and standard deviation. This study was conducted using framework that consists content, pedagogy, assessment and learning environment. There were four administrative regions randomly selected for the study. Though there was no data to be gathered from the regions, the intension here is to address the curriculum frameworks adapted in to different local languages. This was highly focused so as to crosscheck the adaptability of the material in light of the national curriculum framework. From the data gathered through document analysis, the truths revealed were English is suggested to be taught as one of the subjects in the program. Again, “O” class curriculum promotes sophisticated mathematics concepts. Moreover, “O” class curriculum does not give emphasis for creative activities and it gave a less concern for environmental

understanding. However, this does not mean that the curriculum document does not stress on child-centered approaches to learning. Still all activities in the curriculum encourage indoor play, storytelling is one of the teaching methods in the program, the curriculum emphasizes art and creative activities, there were outdoor activities that promote child learning and the curriculum motivates children learn via discussion. It helps preschool teachers to generate songs and lyrics and activities in the curriculum are highly practice oriented.

5.2. Conclusion

Contents indicated in the curriculum material were highly scattered and were not integrated though early childhood care and education philosophy that support integrated contents to be taught in the program. In different literatures, it was mentioned that young children learn best through play and a single activity conveys many different concepts. It forces teachers to teaching Mathematics, English, Mother Tongue, and Science subjects independently. Teaching methods scientifically suggested for young children are song, play (both indoor and outdoor), conversation card, storytelling, art and practical activity. Nevertheless, Ethiopian “O” class curriculum does not have a clear assumption stated with regard to child teaching methods. There was a little consideration of child play and creative activities in the program. Most of the activities are merged together and does not have a clear demarcation. Assessment in early childhood care and education is expected to be authentic in which children are observed, portfolios are organized practical activities are emphasized. But, Ethiopian “O” class curriculum stresses on the paper and pencil tests and questions. Children were forced to take written examination for the sake of the certification and card preparation. Early childhood care and education pioneers recommend that young children should learn in the place where ever thing is open to play, creative activities and child-oriented tasks. This can be reality when preschools organize learning corners such as science, mathematics, art and culture, construction and language corner. Nonetheless, “O” class curriculum in Ethiopia refers only the size of the classroom and the classroom equipment. It does not give a clear direction to create child-friendly learning environment. To sum up, the curriculum analyzed in this study is somehow relevant to the preschool program. The reason for the less relevance was the unavailability of the professionals in the area. During the time of development, Ministry of Education gathered curriculum experts who were qualified in primary and secondary curriculum development. Activities designed for the program were not age appropriate, socially and culturally relevant. Songs and play activities seem directly imported from the western experiences. At document level, Ethiopian preschool program does not have significant difference from primary education. It has a noteworthy implication for the early childhood care and education teacher training program in the country too.

5.3. Recommendations

As the conclusion states, Ethiopian preschool curriculum does not have difference from primary grades in terms of content allocation, teaching methodology suggestion, assessment and learning environment. Therefore; the

program is somehow relevant for young children in light of early childhood education philosophy. As researcher, the following suggestions are forwarded for the policy makers, government officials and all concerned bodies.

- Preschool education should be guided by nationally common curriculum framework in Ethiopia. This may limit private sectors to not use different curriculum models for the same program.
- Ethiopian national early childhood care and education curriculum development requires professionally trained personnel in both adaptation and preparation phases in the future. Consultation of the properly trained professionals may reduce challenges faced during the development.
- At the same time, there should be literature review, analysis of scientific studies and documents that present scientific reality about the program while developing an ECCE policy.
- Many research findings reveal that young children in early childhood care and education program should learn integrated learning contents through child-centered pedagogies such as song, art, practical activities, indoor and outdoor play, conversation card and storytelling. However, this reality is not observable in most of the Ethiopian “O” class program curriculum. Therefore; international trends in the area should be searched and there must be experience sharing program for the national curriculum development team before actual curriculum development.
- There should be strong linkage between early childhood care and education curriculum and teacher education curriculum frame work in the Ethiopia. Consequently, early childhood care and education teacher training has to be integrated in to the truly existing practice of the preschool program. This may limit the curriculum-teacher conflict during the implementation process.
- The overall situation of the program indicates that Ethiopian government should revise its early childhood care and education program policies and standards so as to make the program child appropriate in terms of age, culture and other social attributes.
- The preschool program must allow children learn by their mother tongue language so as to better interact with their environment.

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