

Early child care and education attainment in Ethiopia: Current status and challenges

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the first of the six Education for All (EFA) goal as conceived in Dakar, which calls upon countries to expand and improve comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Strong early childhood foundations — including good health, nutrition and a nurturing environment — can help ensure a smooth transition to primary school, a better chance of completing basic education, and a route out of poverty and disadvantage. The objective of the study is therefore, to assess the status of ECCE in Ethiopia at this last year of the EFA goals and learn experiences from other countries to incorporate in the post EFA goals. This review utilizes document analysis techniques from different sources. The study's findings indicated that the enrolment of pre-primary education is increasing every year though underreporting remains a persistent issue in the kindergarten centers. Preprimary enrolment has increased dramatically starting from the year 2004 E.C. (2011/12) and this is because 'O' class and child to child enrolments have been counted as part of pre-primary. In 2005 E.C. (2012/13) out of the estimated 7.71 million children of the appropriate age group (age 4 to 6) about 2.01 million children have been reported to have access to pre-primary education all over the country. Though the enrolment is small when compared to the appropriate age group, gross enrolment rate is higher than the previous year. This increase is due to the improved reporting of "O" class and child to child data in the year 2005 E.C. (2012/13) from primary schools. Finally, it is recommended among others that; there should be high-level political support, a consultative process to develop a national ECCE policy for children from birth to age 8, stronger and more partnerships between government and the private sector, and upgrading of ECCE staff, particularly through flexible recruitment strategies.

Keywords: Early childhood care and education, education for all, O-class.

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INTRODUCTION

Children aged 3 to 7 years constitute a large section of the Ethiopian population according to the national census conducted in 2007 by Central Statistics Agency (CSA, 2009). Over 16 percent of the then 74 million population, that is, more than 12 million were under this age category and above 10% were in the ages 4 to 6 years. However, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is one of the most neglected areas in Ethiopia. As to the *Annual Educational Statistical Abstract* of Ministry of Education (MoE, 2013), the gross enrollment rate of Kindergarten (KG, ages 4 to 6) was only 6.2% and mainly concentrated in urban areas. Therefore, this paper focuses the first of the six Education for All (EFA) goals set in Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, which calls upon countries

to expand and improve comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

The main objectives of this paper are to:

1. Describe the state of ECCE in all levels (pre- primary, O-class and child to child) with special reference to Ethiopian education system.
2. Examine government policies addressing ECCE issues.
3. Examine patterns of ECCE in access, teacher and curriculum issues.
4. To bring up suggestions towards ensuring ECCE in the post EFA goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The great importance of early childhood was recognized in 2000 at the World Education Forum in the elaboration on goal 1 of the Dakar Framework for Action: not only the importance of early childhood care and education (ECCE), but also its influence on each of the other goals. However, it did not set specific targets on early childhood care and education to be achieved by 2015. Here, literature on definition of ECCE, the government policies, teacher training and curriculum issues shall be briefly reviewed to be followed by the analysis of Early Childhood Care and Education mainstreaming in education in terms of pre-primary, O- class and child to child.

Defining ECCE

Depending on the emphasis given to different aspects of the concept, different agencies and countries have given it different designations. A list of the most common terms used is provided as follows:

1. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) by UNESCO.
2. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) by OECD.
3. Early Childhood Care for Survival, Growth and Development (EC-SGD) by UNICEF.
4. Early Childhood Development (ECD) by the World Bank.
5. Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) by the Consultative Group on ECCD.

Today there is no clear international agreement on the nature and scope of ECCE as a discipline because of its holistic approach. This makes international comparisons difficult. Drawing on this holistic approach, UNESCO (2006:15) uses the following definition:

Early childhood care and education supports children's survival growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal and non-formal settings.

ECCE policies and provision vary according to the age and development of the child, and can be organized in formal, non-formal and informal arrangements (eg. the Ethiopian Education Sector Development Program - ESDP IV). This paper however takes specific approach to the monitoring of ECCE related to the education aspect. It looks at the institutions, the programmes and the policies that affect children's learning and well-being. It covers a wide variety of ECCE arrangements.

Policies on mainstreaming early childhood care and education

In terms of policies pertaining to children, Ethiopia has committed itself to several legislations. One of the most influential declarations in education adopted in 2000 by the Dakar Framework for Action was the first EFA goal. Furthermore, Ethiopia is one of the signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed in December 1991.

In addition, the need for children's development has been duly recognized in the country's education, health, and social welfare policies. The Ethiopian health policy has also proclaimed the need to facilitate children's and family health care in order to combat childhood diseases. Parallel to this, the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (1994) highlights the need for children's overall development during the preschool years. Likewise, the nation's social welfare policy (1996) outlines the country's commitment to fulfilling various social services targeting the care and security of children.

In tune with the international commitment, the Ethiopian Government has embarked on a continuous process of reengineering the issue in its education and training policy and in the past four ESDPs. The first five-year plan of the ESDP-I was launched within the framework of the ETP and the following three year ESDP-II plans did not consider ECCE as absolutely necessary. Not until the third five year ESDP-III plan, was ECCE given the needed policy support by the government to create conducive policy environment and support mechanisms for the participation of various stakeholders.

ECCE received much focus in ESDP IV (2010 to 2014/15), which provides a useful analysis of lessons learnt from ESDP III (2005/06 to 2010/11). Tangible program outcomes and targets were set than ever before the preceding ESDPs through different approaches to meet the objective of ECCE as stipulated in EFA documents. It has placed mainly two key outcome targets: to increase GER from 6.9% in 2009/10 to 20% in 2014/15 and to establish a pre-primary class in all rural and urban primary school compounds (MoE, 2010:29).

However, despite the presence of these statements in different sectors of governmental policy and the comprehensive inclusion of ECCE in the ESDP IV, ECCE in Ethiopia was one of the most neglected areas. Taking this in to consideration, in 2010, as a result of a joint effort by UNICEF and the concerned ministries in the area, a new ECCE policy framework has been developed that is relatively comprehensive and implemented since the past four years. It is the first of its kind in the country, and there is hope that it will bring a positive change.

The policy focuses on enhancing the quality, accessibility and equitable distribution of services for children through more efficient partnerships and capacity building programmes through the following four basic pillars:

1. Parental education,
2. Health and Early stimulation programme (Birth to 3+ years),
3. Pre-school community-based kindergarten (4 to 6+ years), and
4. Community based non-formal school readiness programmes (MoE, 2010).

Thus, it is now apparent that the policy frameworks for ECCE and success in the education system seem to be in place. Therefore, to understand ECCE and to have tangible point of analysis this paper considers the following conceptual framework on ECCE.

ECCE dimensions for the analysis

The first EFA goal – expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education – includes several concepts that are variously interpreted: early childhood, care, education, and vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The goal's complexity, along with its inter-sectoral nature and the absence of a quantitative target, makes it more difficult to monitor than some of the other EFA goals. Understandings of and approaches to *early childhood* vary depending on local traditions, cultures, family structures and the organization of primary schooling (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Nsamenang, 2006; Woodhead, 2006 cited in UNESCO, 2007). It is important to acknowledge and value this diversity.

This paper focuses on both the *care* and the *education* of young children. The term 'care' generally includes attention to health, hygiene and nutrition within a nurturing and safe environment that supports children's cognitive and socio-emotional well-being. Use of the term 'education' in the early childhood years is much broader than pre-schooling, capturing learning through early stimulation, guidance and a range of developmental activities and opportunities. In practice, care and education cannot be separated, and good-quality provision for young children necessarily addresses both dimensions (UNESCO, 2014; OECD, 2001). In this respect, care and education are parts of a whole: both are needed to foster holistic growth, development and learning, as the Dakar Framework states. In doing so, this paper has basically focused on the implementation and status of the policy, curriculum, teacher trainings and delivering mechanisms.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data source

This paper reviews available Ethiopian generated and international literature that throws light on some ECCE issues in the education system. It maps the terrain of current and past few years of ECCE for a wide range of educational indicators and also discusses the theoretical perspectives that have been used in explaining these issues.

Data was gathered from the following sources:

1. Government policy documents and circulars,
2. Library search for books, chapters in books, Journal articles and conference/workshop papers on ECCE related issues.
3. Research findings of education-related Non-Governmental Associations and Research Centers.

Data analysis

The data from the reviews were analyzed and interpreted using descriptive-narrative analysis and descriptive statistics.

DISCUSSION

Here, we present the descriptive results from the document analysis. The results emerged in light of the four dimensions of ECCE: access, teacher training, curriculum and delivery modalities. Following that, the discussions are made for each of the four dimensions in the ECCE.

The pre-schools

Most of the pre-schools are located in unsafe places or are not appropriate for pre-school education because the facilities were not in line with the health and developmental needs of young children. Some centers lack potable water and could be environmentally inadequate due to lack of spaces for play and learning because most of them operate in buildings not originally constructed for that purpose. There is lack of children's books, toys and other relevant educational materials in some of these pre-schools.

Teachers and training institutions

Lack of trained human power: as most of the pre-school teachers are untrained or have very limited training. Although teacher education has a long history of teacher training and education, unlike other levels of education, the idea of formal preschool teacher training is a relatively recent phenomenon. Training of preschool teachers is carried out as a shared responsibility between the government, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. Currently, in Ethiopia, qualified kindergarten teachers follow a one-year training programme offered by Colleges of Teachers' Education upon completion of grade 10.

A recent research conducted by Tigistu (2013) revealed that the majority of the existing personnel working at the different echelons of the education system related to ECCE had irrelevant or only slightly relevant qualifications. Most of the personnel have qualifications in unrelated disciplines at either the bachelor's or master's level—all of which have very little or no specialization

related to children's development and early years education.

Apart from the kindergarten teachers and teacher trainers, the other groups of personnel do not have direct contact with early childhood settings and are mostly working in management, curriculum development, policy designing, and leadership roles. Moreover, unattractive salary of pre-school teachers, particularly in "Kebele" and public owned kindergartens, has led to high turnover of preschool teachers, making pre-school teachers/ children ratio high.

Teacher/pre-school ratio could be as large as 1:130 in Amhara region or as low as 1:15.8 in Addis Ababa region, while the national average is 1:38 for 2012/13. This is an indication of a wide range of variation with implication for the quality of service provided in these centres. The pre-school trained teachers/children ratio is high. There is lack of monitoring to maintain the standard of the curriculum and other facilities in pre-schools and also in the training of preschool teachers.

Most of the training institutions are private owned and urban centered: Hoot et al. (2004) describe the first Preschool Teacher Training Institute (PTTI), established in Addis Ababa in 1986, as the first of its kind in the country. It was a three-month-long specialized training program in which trainees were engaged in basic coursework emphasizing the preparation of preschool teaching materials, followed by a short practicum. Currently, except for the very few government colleges, most of the teacher training institutions are privately owned, and the quality and uniformity has always been questioned by educators.

A study entitled "Early Childhood Care and Education in Ethiopia" (UNESCO, 2006) has identified the lack of a responsible body, a distinctive curriculum, guidelines, or quality assurance systems as major problems in preschool teacher training scheme. As a result, the government is making an effort and plan to shift away from private colleges and focus instead on expanding and capacitating state-owned training colleges in various regions of the country to train early years professionals at the diploma level, both in regular and in-service training schemes.

Curriculum

Lack of similarity among pre-schools in terms of the use of language of instruction

There is lack of uniformity in the curriculum of pre-school education that pre-school centers follow. *Kebele* and public owned preschools use the curriculum of the Ministry of Education, whereas private pre-schools do not. Some pre-schools consider the development of foreign spoken language as an important outcome of pre-

school education.

This has created wide variation among pre-schools. Although these curricula have been in place for a long time, there has been very little supervision of their implementation, which has led preschools, especially the private ones, to copy and rely on foreign curricula. It is not uncommon to see preschools with foreign books and play materials, and teacher training institutions using a foreign curriculum that is unrelated to their local context (Woldehanna, 2011). Thus, questions arise about the impact on Ethiopian children's development in relation to the nation's cultural values and norms.

Inequality in access

There is lack of equal access to all children, since ECCE is mainly an urban issue. Majority of Ethiopian children live in the rural areas where they cannot access early childhood care and education programmes, this is still a challenge. Because the government is not financing preschool education, it was reported that there is no budget allocated to this sub sector and also absence of a separate body at the Ministry of Education responsible for preprimary education makes it impossible to achieve this EFA goal by the target year, 2015.

Delivery modalities

As indicated in the preceding sections of this paper, three delivering modalities are in place through the formal and non-formal mechanisms in the pre-primary education.

Pre-primary education

The pre-primary education includes kindergartens, "O" class and child to child programs. This level normally involves children of ages 4 to 6 enrolled in the pre-primary education. Kindergartens are predominantly operated by communities and non-governmental organizations such as faith-based institutions. The government of Ethiopia introduced "O" class and child to child programs in the primary education system in the past few years. As a result, preprimary enrolment has increased dramatically starting from the year 2004 E.C. (2011/12) and this is because 'O' class and child to child enrolments have been counted as part of pre-primary. Table 1 shows the current status of the pre-primary education system.

As to the education statistics annual abstract of the ministry of education (MoE, 2013), in 2005 E.C. (2012/13) out of the estimated 7.71 million children of the appropriate age group (age 4 to 6) about 2.01 million children have been reported to have access to pre-primary education all over the country. Though the

Table 1. Gross enrolment ratio (GER) - kindergarten, 'O' class and child to child and KG only GER by region in 2005 E.C. (2012/13).

Region	KG, 'O' class and child to child			KG only		
	M	F	T	M	F	T
Tigray	65.3	64.2	64.8	4.5	4.4	4.5
Afar	5.2	6	5.6	2.2	2.4	2.3
Amhara	29.6	28.3	28.9	2.6	2.5	2.5
Oromia	15.5	14.6	15.0	4.7	4.6	4.7
Somale	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.2	1.4	1.3
Benshangul-Gumuz	24.2	22.2	23.2	4.3	4.2	4.3
SNNP	34	30.9	32.5	4.7	4.1	4.4
Gambela	23.8	23.3	23.5	6.2	6.4	6.3
Harar	78.7	65.5	72.3	28.6	24.9	26.8
Addis Ababa	130.7	121.5	126.0	127.1	117.5	122.2
Diredawa	34.3	34.6	34.4	29.1	28.7	28.9
National	26.7	25.5	26.1	6.3	6.1	6.2

Source: MoE (2013).

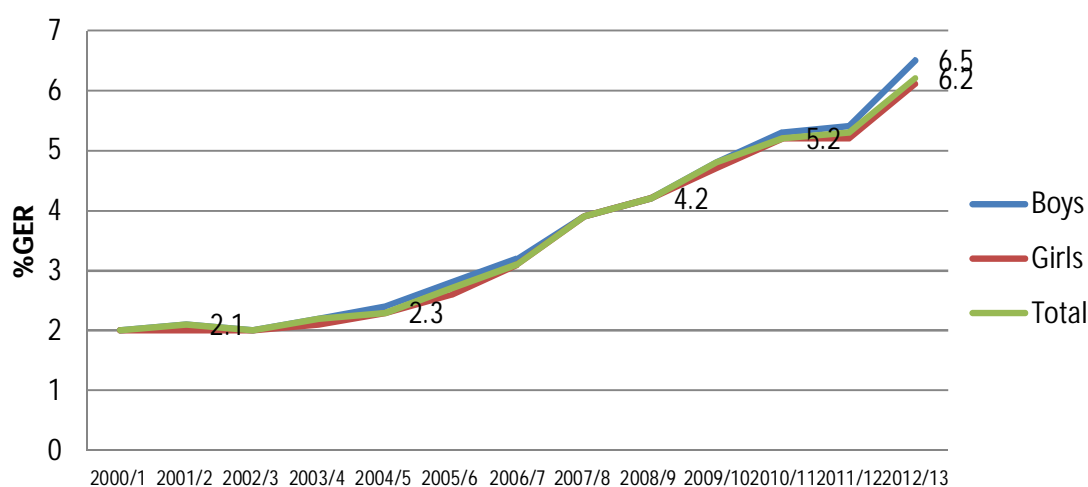


Figure 1. National GER trends in KG (ages 4 to 6) by gender (2000/01 to 2012/13). Source: MoE (2005, 2008 and 2013).

enrolment is small when compared to the appropriate age group, gross enrolment rate is higher than the previous year (Figure 1). This increase is due to the improved reporting of "O" class and child to child data in the year 2005 E.C. (2012/13) from primary schools. Moreover, it is expected that the gross enrolment rate could be higher than the figure indicated as data from several kindergarten centers might be under reported. Had it not been with the additional enrolment from "O" class and child to child, the gross enrolment in 2005 E.C. (2012/13) for pre-primary education would have been 6.2%.

As planned under ESDP IV, there were two outcome targets. These are to increase GER from 6.9% in 2009/10 to 20% in 2014/15 and a pre-primary school to be established in all schools of the country (MoE, 2010:25).

The GER is already by-passed two years before by 6 percent to the target year set. In all modalities of ECCE, the GER was 26.1 percent in 2012/13. This is a remarkable achievement indicating the governments concern in terms of access at this level.

However, a regional disparity in access in pre-primary (all levels) is indicated by 126 percent in Addis Ababa and 1.6 percent in Somale. All the other regions except Afar, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambela have GER less than the National average of 26.1 percent. Similarly, there is a regional disparity in kindergarten (ages 4 to 6), from 122.2 in Addis Ababa to 1.3 in Somale. Though it seems better in GER by a combination of all modalities, the GER in KG for 7 regions are below the national average, that is, 6.2 percent and disparity

among regions is high.

Kindergarten program

Kindergarten is part of the pre-primary education in which children aged 4 to 6 are involved. This program has its own curriculum, trained teachers, administrative staff and school compounds. Most kindergarten schools are operated by non-governmental organizations such as communities, private institutions, and faith-based organizations. About 90% of the Kindergarten enrolment in 2005 E.C. (2012/13) is covered by non-government organizations.

Gross enrolment rate for KG

Gross enrolment rate (GER) is the percentage of students enrolled in certain level, irrespective of age of the corresponding school age population. Net enrolment rate (NER), on the hand, indicates the percentage of students of the appropriate school age enrolled in a given year out of the total school age population in the same year. In Ethiopia, the pre-primary official age is 4 to 6. Figure 1 shows what GER looks like over the last thirteen years to see the general trend. At this point with low level of GER it is not worth mentioning about NER.

Enrolment in Ethiopia has increased steadily for both boys and girls since the late 1990s. Notwithstanding this progress, the gross enrolment rate remains low, at 6.2 in KG in 2012/13, showing an increase of 4.2 percentage points above the value for 2000/01 (2%) and enrolment is heavily concentrated among urban areas (Addis Ababa has a GER of about 50%) and among fairly well-off social groups (MoE, 2013). With a few notable exceptions, children from poorer and rural households have significantly less access to ECCE than those from richer and urban households. While there remains a gender gap in terms of enrollment of boys and girls, with girls still lagging by about 0.4 percentage points, this is not a good achievement in the Ethiopian education system when only considering KG enrollment in the above mentioned category.

“O” class and child to child programs

“O” class is also a part of the pre-primary education system which involves children of age 5 to 6 that do not have access to kindergarten. The children of this program are coached by selected teachers from the respective primary school. Through this process the pre-school children get ready for grade one.

Child to child program

Child to child is also a part of the pre-primary education

system by which older brother or sisters (younger facilitators of grade 5/6 students) play with their younger siblings and neighbor children. The playing becomes learning as the benefiting child gets to know how for instance, to count or to differentiate colors and identify letters. Through this process the preschool child gets ready for school.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATION

The preceding analysis reveals that there has been considerable improvement in participation in Early Childhood Education during the past eleven years in the education system. Although the increase in enrolment has been more significant at the child to child as compared to the other levels since the last two years, progress has been made. In the human life cycle, the early childhood period is a critical period that requires due attention and a great deal of investment. It set the foundation for life and has enormous impact on children's readiness for primary school and transition to secondary education (UNESCO, 2015). 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 of life and eventually contribute to society's growth (UNESCO, 2014).

Several gaps continue to exist in research on ECCE in Ethiopia. First, there is a need to understand the forces (both push and pull) that shape access to ECCE, especially in the context of the recent rapid transformation of Ethiopian society. Second, the education landscape is also changing within this wider social transformation, and a better understanding of these changes would help identify new spaces and language to promote greater ECCE. Third, the impact of current policy and strategies on ECCE needs to be monitored and assessed in order to ensure that current expenditures are actually translating into change or that, where necessary, they can be more effectively structured.

Therefore, there is no better way to break the cycle of poverty and inequality than to invest in children. Hence, in doing so the researcher would like to make the following suggestions:

1. High-level political support, an essential element.
2. Ongoing national data collection and monitoring efforts to assess needs and outcomes in meeting the EFA goals.
3. The designation of a lead ministry or agency for policy on young children and ECCE, and an interagency coordinating mechanism with decision-making power.
4. Well-enforced national quality standards covering public and private provision for all age groups.
5. Stronger and more partnerships between government and the private sector, and important ECCE stakeholders in many regions.

6. Upgrading of ECCE staff, particularly through flexible recruitment strategies, appropriate training, quality standards and remuneration that retains trained staff.
7. Increased and better-targeted public funding of ECCE, with particular attention to poor children, children living in rural areas and those with disabilities.
8. The specific inclusion of ECCE in key government resource documents, such as national budgets, sector plans and the Growth and Transformation Plan and more attention – and more funding – from donor agencies are needed.

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