

Teacher Education Program Contribution to Ensuring Appropriate Practice at Preprimary Schools of Ethiopia

Walelign Admasu¹, Dawit Mekonnen²

¹ Kotebe University of Education

² Addis Ababa University

DOI: 10.15294/ijeces.v12i2.66508

Submitted: 20/02/2023 Revised: 23/05/2023 Accepted: 21/07/2023

ABSTRACT

Teacher education programs are essential components in providing quality education for children. This study attempted to explore the contribution of Teacher Education programs in acquainting preprimary school teachers with the guiding principles, relevant curriculum, the learning cycles of children, and fit instruction and assessment methods for children in practicing curricular activities at preprimary schools. A descriptive survey approach was used in the study. Data were collected from 221 randomly selected graduating class trainees and five purposively selected trainers using questionnaires, interviews, and discussions. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and thematic analysis, and qualitative data were summarized using the following logic. High percentages of respondents did not favor the contribution of Teacher Education programs in acquainting trainees with the guiding principles of child development and learning, appropriateness of the curriculum, learning cycles of children, practice of relevant curricular activities, application of fit methods of instruction and assessment means for children at the expected levels. Besides, problems were reported in teacher education programs, such as unsuitable materials, challenging courses, negative attitudes toward the profession, time shortages, and the absence of centers for skill development. Parallel measures to be taken to alleviate the problems were suggested. Thus, the study has its benefits in indicating the limitations of the teacher education program to take measures in the future at preprimary schools in Ethiopia and the world at large.

Keywords: appropriate practice, the contribution of Teacher education program, preprimary school, and education

Copyright (c) 2023 Walelign Admasu & Dawit Mekonnen

Corresponding Author:

Walelign Admasu

Kotebe University of Education

Email: walelign_admassu@yahoo.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) program involves essential components that contribute to ensuring appropriate practice for children. One of the essential components for quality ECCE is well-educated teachers who facilitate the development and learning of children (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). Well-educated professional teachers who provide appropriate care and education for children can support the entire development of the children (Moe, Moh, and Mwa, 2010). Professional preprimary school teachers can be vital in guiding and nurturing young children (Inccrra, 2014) to ensure quality and appropriate ECCE practice in preschools.

Educated professional teachers can provide fit experiences for all children to develop their maximum potential as a goal of the ECCE program (Moe, 2009) and for ensuring the survival, emotional security, social integration, and cognitive and cultural competencies of the children (Moe, Moh, and Mwa, 2010). This goal can be realized through the provision of appropriate care and education program for children, which is represented by developmentally appropriate learning program (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) that involves age appropriateness (taking into account facts about typical development within a specific age span), Individual appropriateness (understanding the uniqueness of each child in his or her pattern and timing of development) and Cultural and social responsiveness (considering the environment in that respecting the social and cultural context in which children live).

The training of professional teachers for preschool education should align with a developmentally appropriate learning program in which various guiding principles are considered. The program enables teachers to plan instructional tasks at the preprimary school level (Kostelnik et al., 2013). About this, Bredekamp and Copple (1997) have delineated twelve interrelated guiding principles. The principles are: all areas of development are essential to creating a whole child, development and learning follows a sequential process, varying rates of development for every child, development proceeds from simple to complex and demands self-regulation capacities, the role of maturation and experience in development, the effect of early experiences, the role of secure relationships with others in development, the influence of multiple social and cultural contexts in development, and advancement of development when achievable tasks challenge children. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) further indicated that children's experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning, children learn in various ways, and play is a vital vehicle for promoting self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence. Teacher's knowledge of the twelve principles facilitates children's learning to support excellence in ECCE in order to arrive at decisions about the development of children. In addition, teaching at preprimary schools becomes effective if it follows the learning cycles of children that involve four phases. The phases include awareness, exploration, inquiry, and utilization (Kostelnik et al., 2012). While awareness indicates recognition of the learning events, objects, people, or concepts experiencing the existence of something, exploration refers to the process of figuring out the attributes of events, objects, and people using various means to extract meaning from experiences by sensing and talking about experiences, asking questions, collecting information, making discoveries and constructing new understanding.

Similarly, inquiry shows the process of understanding commonalities across events, objects, people, or concepts to generalize concepts and adapt in a mature form. Utilization involves the functional level of learning to use events, objects, people, or concepts. Utilization further involves i) practice (self-motivating, self-initiating, gaining of mastery) and ii) generalization (applying knowledge to similar situations matching identical pairs) that are vital in applying teaching strategies

(Kostelnik et al., 2012). On top of this, preschool teachers should be knowledgeable about effective instructional strategies fit for children and skills such as how to plan curriculum for the individual child and the group, integrate curriculum, address the whole child, individualize program to meet individual needs, teach mathematics, science, and safety practices; apply child-initiated activity and play; engage children in practical activities learning by doing, giving children choices about what they learn and making children active participants in different activities. The teacher education program also enables teachers to use ongoing assessment, exploration, and experimentation as methods of learning to make children observe, touch, taste, smell, hear, talk about their experiences, ask questions, collect information, engage them in discoveries-learn by discovering of reality, and construct new understanding, and use observation as means of collecting information about child's development, individual interests, problem-solving skills, temperament, expression of family culture and behavior as a response to the environment (Bredekamp & Copple (1997); Kostenik et al, 2012).

Generally, the teacher training program is required to equip teachers with basic knowledge (as guiding principles of child development and learning, appropriate curriculum, learning cycles of children, application of fit methods of instruction, and assessment means for children) to contribute to the success of the ECCE practice in preparing professional preschool teachers. If the training program acquaints teachers with knowledge of different conditions of the ECCE program, such professional teachers can make their practice developmentally appropriate for children. So, does the teacher education program equip teachers with the mentioned facts at the expected level to ensure appropriate practice at preprimary schools in Ethiopia? This is a question that needs to be through research for the benefit of children all over the world, especially in developing countries like Ethiopia in the future,

In trying to study the contribution of TEP in ensuring appropriate practice at preschools in Ethiopia, the following research questions were tried to find answers. 1) To what extent does the teacher education program acquaint preprimary school teachers with child development and learning guiding principles?; 2). To what extent does the teacher education program acquaint preprimary school teachers with developmentally appropriate curriculum and the learning cycles for children?; 3) To what extent does the teacher education program acquaint preprimary school teachers with ways of practicing relevant curriculum-fit instructional and assessment methods for children?; 4) What challenges are faced in teacher education programs for ensuring appropriate practice at preprimary schools in Ethiopia, and what measures should be taken to alleviate the problems?

The research findings can benefit various individuals, groups, and institutions. Teacher educators can acquaint themselves with the status of teacher education programs to promote preschool education; preprimary school teachers can also get information for proper practice at preprimary schools; curriculum experts, teacher education institutes, and Regional state education offices may acquire evidence to work for the future betterment of the training; governmental and non-governmental organizations can be informed to support training program for promoting quality education at preprimary schools; and other interested researchers may get a starting point in need of conducting similar researches in the area to bring improvement in the quality of education in preprimary schools.

2. METHOD

Quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) program involves essential components that contribute to ensuring appropriate practice for children. One of the essential components for quality ECCE is well-educated teachers who facilitate the development and learning of children (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). Well-educated professional teachers who provide appropriate care and education for children can support the entire development of the children (Moe, Moh, and Mwa, 2010). Professional preprimary school teachers can be vital in guiding and nurturing young children (Inccrra, 2014) to ensure quality and appropriate ECCE practice in preschools.

Educated professional teachers can provide fit experiences for all children to develop their maximum potential as a goal of the ECCE program (Moe, 2009) and for ensuring the survival, emotional security, social integration, and cognitive and cultural competencies of the children (Moe, Moh, and Mwa, 2010). This goal can be realized through the provision of appropriate care and education program for children, which is represented by developmentally appropriate learning program (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) that involves age appropriateness (taking into account facts about typical development within a specific age span), Individual appropriateness (understanding the uniqueness of each child in his or her pattern and timing of development) and Cultural and social responsiveness (considering the environment in that respecting the social and cultural context in which children live).

The training of professional teachers for preschool education should align with a developmentally appropriate learning program in which various guiding principles are considered. The program enables teachers to plan instructional tasks at the preprimary school level (Kostelnik et al., 2012). About this, Bredekamp and Copple (1997) have delineated twelve interrelated guiding principles. The principles are: all areas of development are essential to creating a whole child, development and learning follows a sequential process, varying rates of development for every child, development proceeds from simple to complex and demands self-regulation capacities, the role of maturation and experience in development, the effect of early experiences, the role of secure relationships with others in development, the influence of multiple social and cultural contexts in development, and advancement of development when achievable tasks challenge children. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) further indicated that children's experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning, children learn in various ways, and play is a vital vehicle for promoting self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence. Teacher's knowledge of the twelve principles facilitates children's learning to support excellence in ECCE in order to arrive at decisions about the development of children. In addition, teaching at preprimary schools becomes effective if it follows the learning cycles of children that involve four phases. The phases include awareness, exploration, inquiry, and utilization (Kostelnik et al., 2012). While awareness indicates recognition of the learning events, objects, people, or concepts experiencing the existence of something, exploration refers to the process of figuring out the attributes of events, objects, and people using various means to extract meaning from experiences by sensing and talking about experiences, asking questions, collecting information, making discoveries and constructing new understanding.

Similarly, inquiry shows the process of understanding commonalities across events, objects, people, or concepts to generalize concepts and adapt in a mature form. Utilization involves the functional level of learning to use events, objects, people, or concepts. Utilization further involves i) practice (self-motivating, self-initiating, gaining of mastery) and ii) generalization (applying knowledge to similar situations matching identical pairs) that are vital in applying teaching strategies

(Kostelnik et al., 2012). On top of this, preschool teachers should be knowledgeable about effective instructional strategies fit for children and skills such as how to plan curriculum for the individual child and the group, integrate curriculum, address the whole child, individualize program to meet individual needs, teach mathematics, science, and safety practices; apply child-initiated activity and play; engage children in practical activities learning by doing, giving children choices about what they learn and making children active participants in different activities. The teacher education program also enables teachers to use ongoing assessment, exploration, and experimentation as methods of learning to make children observe, touch, taste, smell, hear, talk about their experiences, ask questions, collect information, engage them in discoveries-learn by discovering of reality, and construct new understanding, and use observation as means of collecting information about child's development, individual interests, problem-solving skills, temperament, expression of family culture and behavior as a response to the environment (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Kostenik et al, 2012).

Generally, the teacher training program is required to equip teachers with basic knowledge (as guiding principles of child development and learning, appropriate curriculum, learning cycles of children, application of fit methods of instruction, and assessment means for children) to contribute to the success of the ECCE practice in preparing professional preschool teachers. If the training program acquaints teachers with knowledge of different conditions of the ECCE program, such professional teachers can make their practice developmentally appropriate for children. So, does the teacher education program equip teachers with the mentioned facts at the expected level to ensure appropriate practice at preprimary schools in Ethiopia? This is a question that needs to be through research for the benefit of children all over the world, especially in developing countries like Ethiopia in the future,

In trying to study the contribution of TEP in ensuring appropriate practice at preschools in Ethiopia, the following research questions were tried to find answers.

1. To what extent does the teacher education program acquaint preprimary school teachers with child development and learning guiding principles?
2. To what extent does the teacher education program acquaint preprimary school teachers with developmentally appropriate curriculum and the learning cycles for children?
3. To what extent does the teacher education program acquaint preprimary school teachers with ways of practicing relevant curriculum-fit instructional and assessment methods for children?
4. What challenges are faced in teacher education programs for ensuring appropriate practice at preprimary schools in Ethiopia, and what measures should be taken to alleviate the problems?

The research findings can benefit various individuals, groups, and institutions. Teacher educators can acquaint themselves with the status of teacher education programs to promote preschool education; preprimary school teachers can also get information for proper practice at preprimary schools; curriculum experts, teacher education institutes, and Regional state education offices may acquire evidence to work for the future betterment of the training; governmental and non-governmental organizations can be informed to support training program for promoting quality education at preprimary schools; and other interested researchers may get a starting point in need of conducting similar researches in the area to bring improvement in the quality of education in preprimary schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study tried to assess the benefits of teacher training programs in ensuring appropriate practice by equipping teachers with the guiding principles of child development and learning, the developmentally appropriate curriculum for children of different ages, uniqueness, and social and cultural contexts, and the fit ways of practicing the curriculum, learning cycles of children, instructional methods, and assessment means. Besides, it tried to assess the challenges faced in making teacher education programs fit for the purpose and the measures to be taken to alleviate the challenges. In doing so, the data collected using a questionnaire of rating scale type and open-ended interview and discussion questions were organized and analyzed under 1) the contribution of the training program in equipping preschool teachers with guiding principles, 2) the contribution of the training program in acquainting preschool teachers with developmentally appropriate curriculum and learning cycles of children, and 3) the contribution of training program in acquainting preschool teachers with the ways of practicing relevant curriculum, the application instructional and assessment methods appropriate for children and 4) the challenges in TEP for ensuring appropriate curriculum practice at preprimary schools and the measures for alleviating the problems.

3.1. The contribution of the training program in equipping preschool teachers with guiding Principles of child development and learning

To implement ECCE in line with children's age levels, the teachers' education program has its own contribution in equipping the ECCE teachers with guiding principles of child development and learning for promoting practice as perceived by trainees. In line with this, a statement of twelve principles was presented for the teacher trainees to respond by encircling the number from 1-5 (1= highly disagree, 2=disagree through, 3= neutral, and 4=agree to 5= highly agree) corresponding to each statement. The responses of the trainees as to the contribution of the preprimary teacher education program in equipping teachers with the guiding principles of child development and learning are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The use of TEP to acquaint trainee-teachers with the twelve guiding principles of child development and learning

R.No	Criteria	Level of agreement					
		Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	All areas of development are important to create the whole child.	17	7.7	43	19.5	161	72.8
2	Development and learning follow sequential process.	18	8.1	41	18.6	162	73.3
3	Development and learning proceed at varying rates for every child.	15	6.8	40	18.1	166	75.1
4	Development and learning result from an interaction of maturation and experience.	12	5.4	47	21.3	162	73.3
5	Development and learning are profoundly affected by early experiences.	17	7.7	48	21.7	156	70.6
6	Development and learning proceed toward complexity& self-regulation capacities.	16	7.2	45	20.4	160	72.4
7	Development and learning happen at best as children have secure relationships with others.	14	6.3	37	16.7	170	77.0
8	Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.	14	6.3	40	18.1	167	75.5
9	Development & learning advance when children are challenged by achievable tasks.	10	4.5	42	19.0	169	76.5
10	Children's experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning	10	4.5	46	20.8	165	74.7
11	Children learn in a variety of ways	11	5.0	41	18.6	169	76.4
12	Play is a vital vehicle for promoting self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence.	11	5.0	46	20.8	164	75.4
	Average	14	6.3	43	19.5	164	75.4

The teacher training program is expected to help teacher-trainees understand the twelve guiding principles of child development and learning at a very high level. However, taking the average percentage, 75.4% of the respondents showed agreement as to the contribution of the training in acquainting teachers with the twelve guiding principles of child development and learning. Though many respondents agreed that the training has contributed to acquainting teachers with the guiding principles, a reasonably high percentage of the respondents reported either a disagree or neutral position on the contribution of the training in creating an understanding of the twelve guiding principles. This means that 24.6% of the respondents needed to show agreement as to the contribution of the training in creating an understanding of the principles taken as a whole. More specifically, in six out of the twelve principles, more than 25% of the respondents rated the contribution of TEP in acquiring the principles at either disagreement or neutral positions. The training program was expected to enable teachers to understand the twelve guiding principles of child development and learning at a very high level. However, the truth is far from the expectation, as learned from Table 1 above. Similarly, this truth was confirmed by the report of many respondents through interviews and discussions, namely, that the TEP needed to have the expected high level of contribution in acquainting trainees with the guiding principles of child development and learning at preschools.

3.2. The contribution of Teacher Education Program in acquainting Preschool Teachers with Developmentally appropriate curriculum and cycles of children's learning

The teacher education program is expected to contribute to equipping ECCE teachers with the developmental appropriateness of the ECCE curriculum for children and the learning cycles of children to promote practice. So, the indicators of curriculum appropriateness and the five learning phases/cycles of children were presented for the would-be-teachers to rate whether they were communicated in the training program or not by encircling numbers from 1-5 (1= highly disagree, 2=disagree through 3= neutral and 4=agree to 5= highly agree) corresponding to each statement. The responses of teacher-trainees as to the contribution of TEP in acquainting them with an appropriate curriculum for children and the learning cycles of children are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The benefit of TEP to acquaint trainee-teachers with fit curriculum and the cycles of children's learning

R. No	Criteria	Level of agreement					
		Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
	The teacher training program acquaints you as prospective teachers with:	F	%	F	%	F	%
I	Age-appropriate curriculum for preschoolers —fit for every child age-related characteristic- i.e.,						
1	what children like in the age range in terms of interest, abilities, skills	11	5.0	38	17.2	172	77.8
2	how to develop activities and routines that accommodate the age group	10	4.5	43	19.5	168	76.0
3	how to provide materials that are safe, challenging and achievable	13	5.9	37	16.7	171	77.4
	Average	11	5.0	39	22.2	170	77.0
II	Individually Appropriate curriculum for preschoolers —fit to the strengths, interests, and needs of every child in the group, i.e.,						
1	the uniqueness of each child as a person	12	5.4	54	24.4	165	70.1
2	the rate of growth of each child	10	4.5	40	18.1	171	77.4
3	the individual learning style of each child	12	5.4	49	22.2	160	72.4
4	the previous knowledge and experiences that each child brings to class	11	5.0	43	19.5	167	75.6
	Average	11	5.0	47	21.3	166	74.7
III	Socially and Culturally Appropriate curriculum for preschoolers —fit for social and cultural contexts in which children live-i.e.,						
1	Culture as values, traditions, beliefs	16	7.2	37	16.7	168	76.0

2	the children and families in the context of the community	14	6.3	36	16.3	171	77.4
3	the family culture (values, traditions, beliefs) of each child	17	7.7	37	16.7	187	75.5
4	the consequence that lack of cultural awareness leads to assumptions	12	5.4	41	18.6	168	76.0
	Average	15	6.8	38	17.2	173	78.3
IV	The five phases /Cycle of children Learning						
1	Awareness- making the child to aware about something exist (observing friends playing game)	18	8.1	51	23.1	152	68.8
2	Exploration- making the child to explore what captured attention (finds game materials on shelf at school)	18	8.1	44	19.9	159	72.0
3	Acquisition- making the child to ask questions to learn new information and take action.	13	5.9	53	24.0	155	70.1
4	Practice-making the child to gain mastery (playing for several times and days) with self-motivation and self-initiation	13	5.9	48	21.7	160	72.4
5	Generalization- making the child to apply new knowledge to similar situations...	20	9.0	47	21.3	154	69.7
	Average	16	7.2	49	22.2	156	70.6

The teacher training program is expected to create a profound understanding of the age, individual, and cultural appropriateness of the preschool curriculum for preschoolers. The contribution of TEP in acquainting trainees with the three types of appropriateness was not favored by a high percentage of respondents. This means that a high percentage of respondents should have reported high agreement about the contribution of TEP in acquainting teachers with age, individual, and cultural appropriateness of the curriculum in some items of the three types of appropriateness. This is more pronounced in the case of individual appropriateness. Similarly, a high percentage of respondents did not support the benefits of teacher training programs in acquainting teachers with the learning cycles of children as expected. The interview questions indicated the teacher education program's limitations in acquiring an appropriate curriculum for children. Many respondents said the training needed to indicate how the curriculum was appropriate for each child and responsive to social and cultural contexts. About 27.6% to 41.2% of the respondents rated in disagreement or neutral position as to the contribution of TEP in acquainting teachers with the five learning phases of children. Similarly, in the focus group discussion, the participants reported that the cycles of children's learning were only considered topics in part of the training. So, the training has limitations in making teachers competent in following the five learning cycles of children.

3.3. The benefit of preschool teacher education Program in acquiring Teachers with Appropriate curriculum practice, methods of instruction, and Means of Assessment

The teacher education program is expected to equip ECCE teachers with knowledge of how to practice relevant curricular activities, apply fit methods of instruction, and fit assessment means for children to promote practice as perceived by trainees. The prospective teachers responded to the representative sample statements by encircling the number from 1-5 (1= highly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neutral, and 4=agree to 5= highly agree) corresponding to each statement. The responses of the would-be teachers as to the contribution of the preprimary teacher education program in equipping teachers with practicing relevant curricular activities, applying fit instructional methods, and assessing mechanisms for children are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The benefit of TEP in acquainting trainees with the curriculum practice, instructional, and assessment methods

R. No	Criteria	Level of agreement					
		Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
I	The TEP acquaints the prospective teachers with as how to:						
1	plan curriculum for the individual child and the group	36	16.3	50	22.6	135	61.0
2	use an integrated curriculum	19	8.6	53	24.0	149	67.4
3	address the whole child (physical, cognitive, social, emotional)	10	4.5	32	14.5	179	81.0
4	individualize program to meet individual needs	13	5.9	32	14.5	176	79.6
5	teach about mathematics and Science	15	6.8	53	24.0	153	69.2
6	Teach safety practices	9	4.1	52	23.5	160	72.4
7	recognize the importance of child-initiated activity	9	4.1	35	15.8	177	80.1
8	recognize the significance of play	15	6.8	28	12.7	178	80.5
9	engage children in practical activities...making them learn by doing	12	5.4	51	28.1	158	71.5
10	give children choices about what they learn and how	14	6.3	48	21.7	159	72.0
11	make children active participants in different tasks /activities	9	4.1	58	25.3	156	70.6
12	use ongoing assessment of children and program	10	4.5	53	24.0	158	71.5
	Average	15	6.8	45	20.4	162	73.3
II	Use exploration and experimentation as method of helping children learn by making them to:						
1	-observe, touch, taste, smell, hear	11	5.0	53	24.0	157	71.0
2	-talk about their experiences	7	3.2	57	25.8	157	71.0
3	-ask questions about things	8	3.6	46	20.8	167	75.6
4	-collect information	9	4.1	51	23.1	161	72.8
5	-engage in discoveries -learn by discovering of reality	10	4.5	48	21.7	163	73.7
6	-construct new understanding	13	5.9	50	22.6	158	71.5
	Average	10	4.5	51	23.1	161	72.8
III	Use observation as means of getting information about child's						
1	development (social, emotional, cognitive, and physical, language)	14	6.3	47	21.3	166	72.4
2	individual interests	16	7.2	52	23.5	153	69.2
3	coping and problem-solving skills	13	5.9	59	26.7	149	67.4
4	temperament	13	5.9	51	23.1	157	71.1
5	expression of family culture	17	7.7	54	24.4	150	67.9
6	behavior as a response to the environment	11	5.0	60	27.1	150	67.9
	Average	14	6.3	54	24.4	154	68.7

A teacher education program (TEP) for preschool education is expected to acquaint the would-be-teachers with how to make the ECCE curriculum fit for children by applying appropriate instructional methods and assessment means for preschoolers. The contributions of the training for the mentioned purposes are needed to arrive at the expected high level of benefits. As observed from Table 3, in many cases, more than 25% of the respondents did not favor the contribution of the training at a high level. Only in four items was the TEP contribution reported at the needed percentage level (around 80% contribution). However, the respondents rated the rest of the items at the medium level (ranging from 72.8% up to 61.0 %). This shows that the training has limitations in making teachers competent in practicing fit curriculum at the highest level of achievement, employing fit methods that help children learn, and using different fit approaches to assess children's development and learning.

In response to the interview questions, interviewees reported that the teaching approaches used in the TEP courses were something other than a model for the future work of the trainees at preprimary schools. This idea was also confirmed by trainers in that they reported that the TEP courses needed to employ teaching methods aligned with the ECCE practice, which is why qualified teachers gave few TEP courses. Besides, the focus group discussion revealed that model classrooms with fit teaching aids and materials for children were not found in the training areas (either in the institutes or other places as preschools) that were used as samples as to the application of what is learned theoretically in the training sessions to the preschool classes practically.

3.4. The Challenges Faced and in Teacher Education Program and Measures in alleviating Problems to ensure Appropriate Preprimary School Education

Through open-ended and interview questions, the respondents (trainees and trainers) reported problems faced and suggested measures to alleviate the problems in the Teacher Education Program (TEP). The problems associated with the ECCE Teacher education program and measures to be considered in alleviating the problems are summarized as follows.

a) The Problems faced in preschool Teacher Education Program

- (1) The training program for preschool teachers and workers needed to reflect alignment. This means many courses in the Teacher Education Program did not contribute to practicing ECCE curricular activities. More than half of the TEP courses (25 out of 42) are bridging and supportive courses, so they did not contribute directly to equipping teachers with knowledge of the appropriate curriculum and its practice, methods of teaching, and assessing means meant for preschool children.
- (2) It was also reported that some training program courses are difficult to conceptualize for the trainees due to lack of proper organization of the courses and language barriers on the part of the trainees, creating obstacles in integrating TEP and ECCE curricula. Besides, it was reported by trainees and trainers that some of the modular materials for the TEP needed to be prepared in such a way that the courses did not touch the concepts in the curriculum for preprimary schools.
- (3) The approaches employed in training were also reported as inappropriate. On top of this, a lack of positive attitude towards the profession on the part of the trainees was reported. Such attitude was reflected by a graduating class trainee who said, "I dislike teaching, and I will never remain as a teacher in my future life." This shows that the training has limitations in creating attitudinal changes in the trainees.
- (4) Model teaching-learning centers for developing various teaching skills were absent in the training areas (either in the institutes or in the preschools) for theoretically relating what the trainees were learning in the class to practice.
- (5) The need for more time for TEP, especially in the in-service program, created obstacles to connecting the training with the ECCE curricular activities as expected. Learning five to eight courses with 15 to 24 credit hours that could be doubled in allotting periods in two months makes it difficult for in-service trainees to connect what they learned theoretically with practice.

b) Measures for Alleviating Problems of the Teacher Education Program

- (1) Because all Teacher Education Program courses did not contribute to children's learning, the program should include only relevant courses that benefit preschool children or that target preschool education. This means the program should include only relevant courses for children's learning.
- (2) It was reported that revision or amendment for teacher education program courses inappropriate for the work should be considered in the future. Besides, revision of the modular materials for the challenging courses by qualified professionals was highly needed to minimize the problem. On top of this, it was suggested that well-qualified trainers were highly expected in all program specialty areas.

- (3) Respondents recommended developing a positive attitude towards the profession from concerned bodies in the future, for instance, through short-term training and continuous professional development programs for newly recruited personnel.
- (4) It was also suggested that the Teacher education program for the preprimary schools needs to create opportunities for developing various skills for the trainees in exercising the application of appropriate teaching approaches and the preparation of teaching materials in that providing sufficient time for practice in the future at the training institutes with the help of qualified professionals. Besides, the training would also be conducted using language that could make the training easy for the trainees to apply the knowledge at the ground level.

Discussion

The teacher education program (TEP) is expected to benefit trainees in knowing the guiding principles of child learning and development. However, it was found that the program only acquaints trainees with the guiding principles at a medium level. Thus, the TEP needed to equip trainees with the guiding principles of child development and learning at the expected high level. This result did not go in line with the idea of Kostelnik, Rupiper, Soderman, & Whiren (2012) and Bredekamp and Copple (1997) that the teacher education program is expected to equip trainee teachers to understand the twelve guiding principles of child development and learning at a very high level. Thus, TEP has limitations in equipping future preprimary school teachers with all the guiding principles of child development and learning.

Preschool teachers' understanding of the concept of developmentally appropriate curriculum for children and the learning cycles of children can promote curriculum practice. However, the contribution of the TEP in creating understanding or in acquainting trainees with the three types of appropriateness, mainly in the individual appropriateness and learning cycles of children, was not favored by a very high percentage of respondents. This fact differs from the idea of Bredekamp and Copple (1997) that the teacher training program should create a profound understanding of the curriculum's age, individual, and cultural appropriateness for preschoolers. Similarly, the contributions of TEP in acquainting teachers with the learning cycles of children did not go in line with the idea of Kostelnik, Rupiper, Soderman, and Whiren (2012) that the teacher education program is expected to enable teachers to have a profound understanding about the five learning phases or cycles of children at a very high level for the fact that effective teaching at preprimary schools demands to follow the five learning cycles of children. Thus, the training did not have the expected benefit for teachers to be competent in following the five learning phases of guiding, coaching, and teaching preschool children.

Teacher education programs should equip preprimary school teachers with the necessary knowledge to practice relevant curricular activities and apply fit methods of instruction, as well as assessment means for children to promote curriculum practice. However, the training has limitations in making teachers competent in practicing fit curriculum at the highest level of achievement, employing fit methods that help children learn, and using different fit means of assessing the development and learning of children. The obtained results are different from the idea of Kostenik, Rupiper, Soderman, and Whiren (2012) that a teacher education program (TEP) for preschool education is expected to acquaint the would-be-teachers with the ways of making ECCE curriculum fit for children, application of appropriate instructional methods and assessment means for preschoolers at a profound level.

Some courses in the teacher education program did not match the preprimary education curriculum. Besides, the lack of a positive attitude towards the profession, the use of unfit approaches, the absence of model teaching-learning centers, and the shortage of time for training were reported as severe problems. Thus, these problems may create obstacles in the teacher education program for practicing preschool education curriculum. For instance, if the trainees' attitude towards the profession was not at the expected level and models were not there in the training sessions for trainees in using different fit methods/approaches of teaching, the teacher education program would not contribute to implementing relevant curriculum fit for preschoolers. The presence of centers for teaching skills development (either in institutes or other places such as preschools) is essential for the trainees to try out what they learn in the class. This may enhance the contribution of the training for properly implementing relevant curricula at preschools. Sufficient time for the training, especially for the in-service program, should be thought to conceptualize concepts presented in the program for proper implementation of preschool activities. The inclusion of new fit courses, revision of the existing courses and modular materials for the courses, development of trainees' positive attitudes towards the profession, equipping trainees with fit skills of teaching, provision of sufficient training time, fulfilling qualified professionals for the program were reported as measures in making teacher education program to ensure the implementation of relevant curriculum at preschools of Ethiopia. If these measures are considered, the training program might contribute to adequately implementing a fit curriculum for children.

4. CONCLUSION

Though a teacher training program is expected to enable teachers to better understand the guiding principles of child learning and development at a very high level, the truth is far from the expectation as it is learned from the participant's responses to the study.

The training program also expects to create a profound understanding of the age, individual, social, and cultural appropriateness of the ECCE curriculum for preschool teachers. However, the expected high level of acquaintance for trainees about the appropriateness of curriculum still needs to be achieved in some of the three types of appropriateness. Besides, the contribution of TEP in acquainting ECCE teachers with the five learning phases/cycles of children did not arrive at the expected level of support. The training has limitations in helping teachers to become competent in following the five learning cycles in teaching children.

The TEP has limitations in making preschool teachers competent in applying relevant curriculum at the highest level, employing fit methods such as exploration and experimentation as methods of helping children learn, using fit approaches for assessing the development and learning of children as an observation as means of getting accurate information about development, interest, skills of coping with stress and problem-solving, temperament, expressing the culture of the society in response to the environment of children.

Generally, the TEP did not play the expected high level of role in acquainting trainees with guiding principles, appropriate curriculum, learning cycles of children, ways of practicing curricular activities, and fit methods of instruction and assessment for children.

Many TEP courses were bridging and supportive courses that have no direct contribution to acquainting teacher-trainees with the needed knowledge to teach children. Besides, the TEP courses were not delivered with methods that qualified teachers can use as models for the trainees using suitable curriculum materials. Some courses take more work to conceptualize for the trainees due to

the need to organize the courses properly. Moreover, it was reported that the courses in the training program needed to cover various needed knowledge and skills that enable teachers to make their practice appropriate for children at high levels. Thus, TEP courses need revision for future training and should be given by qualified teachers based on appropriate curriculum materials.

Implication of the Study: Recommendation. The following points should be considered in the future to use the TEP in making the preschool curriculum and its practice relevant for the children. a) The guiding principles of child development and learning, the learning cycles of children, and the fit teaching methods and assessment means for preschool children would be the main focus in teacher training programs for preprimary schools in the future. Besides, minimizing challenges faced in the training and updating the training need consideration in the future. b) All courses in the Teacher Education Program should be developed to contribute to the actual practice at ground level in the preschool setting. The limitations of the courses in equipping preschool teachers with needed knowledge will be considered in the future. c) It would be better if the teacher education program is upgraded to the degree level in the future to give time to relate theory to practice. The shortage of qualified teachers, the unsuitability of some modular materials for the training, the negative attitude of trainees towards the profession, and the lack of model centers for skill development need to get due attention from concerned bodies in the future training of teachers for preschools. d) On top of this, further study about the alignment of the teacher education program (TEP) and early childhood care and education (ECCE) curricula seems essential for enhancing the benefits of the teacher education program in the future.

REFERENCES

- Bredenkamp, S., & Copple, C. (1997). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs. (Revised Edition)*. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1426.
- Copple, C., & Bredenkamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. National Association for the Education of Young Children. 1313 L Street NW Suite 500, Washington, DC 22205-4101.
- Inccrra. (2014). The Award of Excellence for Preschool Teaching and Learning: Early Childhood Development, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Illinois ExceleRate® Illinois.
- Kagan, S. L., & Kauerz, K. (2006). Preschool programs: Effective curricula. *Tremblay RE, Barr RG, Peters RDeV, eds. Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*, 1-5.
- Karen Slattery educational research center for child development. (2017). Karen's Early Childhood Curriculum position statement. Slattery educational research center for child development: An equal opportunity/Equal access institution, Florida Atlantic University.
- Kostelnik, M. J., Rupiper, M. L., Soderman, A. K., & Whiren, A. P. (2013). *Developmentally appropriate curriculum in action*. Pearson Higher Ed.
- Moe. (2009). Strategies for improving Science and Mathematics education in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Unpublished
- Moe, Moh, and Mwa. (2010). National policy framework for early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Cloutier, A., Dwyer, J., & Sherrod, S. E. (2016, June). Exploration of hands-on/minds-on learning in an active STEM outreach program. In *2016 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition*.
- Dhankar, R. (2012). Curriculum framework in search of a coherent epistemology: A case study of Indian National Curriculum Frameworks.

- Rossiter, J. (2016). Scaling up access to quality early education in Ethiopia: Guidance from international experience. *Policy Paper*, 8.
- Workman, S., & Ullrich, R. (2017). Quality 101: Identifying the core components of a high-quality early childhood program. *Center for American Progress*, 1-16.
- Wood, E., & Hedges, H. (2016). Curriculum in early childhood education: Critical questions about content, coherence, and control. *The curriculum journal*, 27(3), 387-405.