

The Contribution of Preschool Teacher Education Program in Equipping Teachers with Indicators of Relevant Curriculum in Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the contribution of Teacher Education Program in equipping preschool teachers with some indicators of relevant curriculum practice as guiding principles of development and learning, appropriate curriculum, learning cycles, and fit methods of instruction and assessment means for children in Ethiopia. A survey method was employed in conducting the study. The data for the study were collected from 221 teacher-trainees using questionnaires of rating scale with open-ended questions and five trainers using interview questions. The data were analysed using frequency, percentage, and sums. The data from survey questionnaire indicated that the contribution of Teacher Education Program in acquainting trainees with guiding principles of child development and learning, developmentally appropriate curriculum, learning cycles of children, fit methods of instruction and assessment means for children did not get high level of agreement from the respondents. The data from interview and open ended questions revealed obstacles as lack of qualified teachers, unsuitable curriculum materials, difficult courses, negative attitude to the profession, time shortage and absence of centres for skills development in the training program. Measures useful for alleviating problems were also indicated parallel to the problems.

Keywords: Developmentally Appropriate Program, relevant curriculum practice, pre-primary schools, teacher education program

The early childhood care and education (ECCE) program has the goal of providing children with experiences that allow them to develop and learn to their maximum potential (MOE, 2009). This goal is achieved when the program is given by professional teachers trained in well-designed teacher education programs. The professional teachers can create secured and responsive relations with children of the early childhood period to enhance their competencies and contribute a lot in ensuring relevant and quality care and education program in pre-primary schools (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2010).

The care and education program for children becomes effective in that it creates opportunities for children by teachers who believe that learning is fundamental to the full development of human potential and provide developmentally appropriate learning. In line with this, Copple and Bredekamp

(2006, 2009) indicated that the ECCE program can be enhanced if teacher education program acquaints preschool teachers with the essence of the three dimensions of appropriateness (age, individual, and cultural) and with additional knowledge that enables teachers to implement relevant and quality curriculum at pre-primary schools. While age appropriateness indicates the need to consider information about typical development within a specific age span, the individual appropriateness uses to understand the uniqueness of each child in the pattern and timing of development. But, the contextual appropriateness helps in respecting the social and cultural context in which children live during planning the curriculum experiences, and coaching and guiding children of the period.

The training program for preschool teachers can enhance developmentally appropriate practice at pre-primary schools if the program bases on the ideas of different theorists who follow different perspectives including maturational, mental health, behavioural, constructivist, and humanistic (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). As to Kagan and Kauerz (2012), and other life perspectives as a particular religious or cultural orientation can also be considered in implementing the developmentally appropriate programs. Thus, the consideration of different perspectives makes the ECCE program relevant so that the development and implementation of the program always bases on an eclectic range of ideologies and theories (Brooker et al., 2014 cited in Wood & Hedges 2016). Thus, an eclectic approach is the crucial view for practice in early childhood education in that taking the best ideas from all views that is reflected in the developmentally appropriate program.

The developmentally appropriate program for children is taken in to account in the preparation of relevant ECCE curriculum, planning activities for children and training professionals for the program (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Such program for children is also considering the balance of child-guided and teacher-guided experiences and Play activities that could be achieved when teachers of pre-schoolers follow twelve guiding principles of child development and learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Kostenik et al., 2012) that indicate developmental theories and current research outputs for guiding their daily decisions. As to Kostenik, et al (2012), the guiding principles include: the need to consider the holistic nature of development, orderly sequence of development, varying rates in the development of learners, learning through active participation of learners, learning through continuous process of challenging and mastery of concepts and skills, using a variety of profiles of learning styles (Kinaesthetic, Auditory, and Visual), learning through the combination of physical experiences, social interaction, and reflection, safety and security feeling of children, and play activities. Similarly, Bredekamp and Copple (1997) have delineated the twelve interrelated principles as: the principle of making all areas of development important to create the whole child, making development and learning to follow sequential process, to proceed at varying rates for every child and toward complexity and self-regulation capacities, result from interaction of maturation and experience, be

profoundly affected by early experiences, happen at best when children have secure relationships with others, occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts, and advance when children are challenged by achievable tasks. They further stated that children's experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning, children learn in a variety of ways, and play is a vital vehicle for promoting self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence. Thus, the pre-primary school teachers are expected to know these various developmental principles that guide their thinking, planning, and instructional tasks in order to make informed decisions for facilitating children's learning at the pre-primary school level. The knowledge about guiding principles for effective early learning practices supports excellence in early childhood care and education program to arrive at decision based on knowledge about individual children.

The relevant curriculum practice at preschools can also be promoted when teachers are well acquainted with children learning cycle in the Teacher Education Program (TEP). Children of the pre-primary schools can be benefited if they are guided and coached following their learning cycles that involve vital phases of awareness, exploration, inquiry, and utilization (practice and generalization) (Kostenik et al., 2012). While the awareness phase shows broad recognition of the parameters of the learning – events, objects, people, or concepts with experience understanding that something exists, the exploration phase indicates the process of figuring out the components of events, objects, and people using available means to extract personal meaning to experiences through sensing and talking about experiences, asking questions, collecting information, making discoveries and constructing new understanding. Whereas, the Inquiry phase implies the process of understanding commonalities across events, objects, people, or concepts to come to generalize personal concepts and adapt them to more adult ways of thinking and behaving. The utilization phase is the functional level of learning to make use of the understanding of events, objects, people, or concepts that involves practice (self- motivating, self-initiated, ways children gain mastery-child plays several times over several days) and generalization (applying new knowledge- things that go together) to similar situations... matching identical pairs. It is also indicated that the pre-primary school teachers are expected to acquire knowledge about effective instructional strategies and skills. Thus, the teacher education program should acquaint the early childhood education teachers with effective instructional strategies fit for teaching children and skills such as how to plan curriculum for the individual child and the group; use an integrated curriculum; address the whole child (physical, cognitive, social, emotional); individualize program to meet individual needs; teach about mathematics, science , and safety practices; apply child-initiated activities and play; engage children in activities to learn by doing, and giving children choices about what they learn and make active participants in different activities (Kostenik et al , 2012). Besides, the teacher education program acquaints teachers with the exploration and experimentation

as method of learning that enables children to observe, touch, taste, smell, hear, talk about their experiences, ask questions about things, collect information, engage them in discoveries-learn by discovering reality, and construct new understanding. In relation to this, the teacher education program enables preschool teachers to use ongoing assessment of children and program (Mincemoyer, 2016). The use of observation as means of collecting information about a child's development (social, emotional, cognitive, and physical, language and literacy), individual interests, coping strategies and problem-solving skills, temperament, expression of family culture and behaviour as a response to the environment are other issues to be learned through TEP for preschool education.

Teacher Education Program for pre-primary school education is expected to equip teachers with the aforementioned guiding principles, learning cycles of children and methods of instruction and assessment means and ways of practicing relevant curriculum at preschools. Thus, teachers of the preschool education should have knowledge about appropriate learning program for children such as the guiding principles of child development and learning, fit curriculum for developmental level of children, children learning cycles, and the basic elements for relevant ECCE curriculum such as teaching methods and assessment means (Kostenik et al., 2012). In the case of Ethiopia, the contribution of TEP in acquainting the pre-primary schools teachers with the indicators of relevant curriculum practice in pre-primary schools (guiding principles of child development and learning, appropriateness of curriculum for children, learning cycles of children, the strategies of instruction and assessment for children) seem under question mark so that assessing the contribution of teacher education program in acquainting the given indicators becomes the target of this research. So, the study on the contribution of preschool teacher education program in equipping teachers with indicators of relevant curriculum at pre-primary schools can be considered as a vital task; showing the need of making children learn developmentally relevant skills and responsive to the contexts all over the world especially in developing countries like Ethiopia. The teacher education program is expected to equip teachers with useful knowledge, attitude and skills that enable them to engage in appropriate curriculum practice fit for children of the different age and contexts (Rossiter, 2016; Workman & Ullrich, 2017).

The Teacher Education Program has the responsibility to produce practitioners who enhance the quality of education to ensure appropriate curriculum practice. The responsibility of this program can be understood by studying its contribution in equipping teachers with the indicators of relevant curriculum practice (the guiding principles of child development and learning, concepts of developmentally appropriate curriculum, learning cycles of children, applying fit methods of instruction, and means of assessment for children). So, does the teacher education program of Ethiopia enable pre-primary school teachers to have acquaintance with the indicators of

developmentally appropriate practice? This is a broad question that needs answer through research.

The general objective of the study was to assess the contribution of teacher education program in acquainting teachers with guiding principles, developmentally relevant curriculum, learning cycle of children, the implementation of fit curriculum, and the application of fit methods of instruction and assessment means for children. This is for the reason that the program (TEP) contributes to the success of the Early Childhood Care and Education in equipping teacher with the mentioned indicators of relevant curriculum (Kostenik et al., 2012). Thus, it is required of the teacher education program to equip teachers with such knowledge in preparing professional preschool teachers. If the training does not touch these knowledge areas, it might not produce professional teachers who consider the developmental needs of children during their daily practice. The professional teachers can make their practice developmentally appropriate for children if they are equipped with knowledge of different conditions of ECCE program. If so, assessing the contribution of TEP in equipping teachers with such knowledge that make the preschool curriculum appropriate for pre-schoolers seems highly essential. In doing so, attempts were made to study the contribution of Teacher Education program in ensuring appropriate curriculum practice at preschools of Ethiopia. The specific objectives of the research were as follows:

1. To find out the extent to which the teacher education program acquaints pre-primary school teachers with guiding principles of child development and learning,
2. To indicate the extent to which the teacher education program acquaints pre-primary school teachers with developmentally appropriate curriculum and children learning cycles,
3. To show the extent to which the teacher education program acquaints pre-primary school teachers with relevant curriculum practice, fit instructional and assessment methods for children, and
4. To explore the challenges faced in teacher education program in ensuring appropriate curriculum and the measures to be taken for alleviating the problems at pre-primary schools of Ethiopia.

In trying to achieve the research objectives; methods and materials of research were communicated at first and then the results and discussion of the study followed in accordance to the research objectives and at last the summary and conclusions of the study were brought in the same order. The findings of the research can benefit various individuals, groups, and institutions. It may help pre-primary school teacher-educators for promoting preschool education. The findings of this research can also help teachers of the education colleges and pre-primary schools to work for the proper implementation of developmentally appropriate practice at pre-primary schools. The study may give valuable information for curriculum experts, teacher education institutes, and Regional

States Education Bureau to rework the training for ensuring appropriate ECCE practice in the future. Governmental and non-governmental organizations who are concerned with quality education can use the findings of this research in their support of the training program. The research may also be used as a starting point for other interested researchers who will have a need to conduct similar researches in the area to bring improvement in the quality of education in pre-primary schools.

Methods and Materials

To explore the contribution of teacher education program in equipping pre-primary school teacher with relevant curriculum practice in Ethiopia, the survey approach was used in that collecting data from graduating class trainees and trainers of two institutes in the country (Kotebe University and Hawassa Teachers' College) as data sources. The data for the study were collected from 221 graduating class trainee-teachers selecting sample using simple random sampling method and five teacher-trainers using convenience sampling technique. The data were collected using two types of instruments: questionnaire and interview.

A questionnaire of the rating scale type was used to collect data about the benefits of teacher education program in acquainting ECCE teachers with guiding principles of child development and learning (12 items), the appropriateness of ECCE curriculum for the age levels (3 items), uniqueness (with 3 items) and contexts (4 items) of children and the children learning cycles (5 items). Besides, the questionnaire scale was used to collect information about the contribution of Teacher Education Program in equipping trainees with different activities in practicing relevant curriculum (15 items), the application of methods of instruction as exploration and experimentation (6 items), and the use of assessment method as observation (6 items) for children. All items of the questionnaire scales were rated from maximum of five to minimum of one point. For all items, the summative scores below mid points (I and II quartiles) were representing disagreement level; the middle scores (50-75% scores or III quartile) were representing medium positions and scores above the middle scores (above 75% or IV quartile scores) were representing agreement position. The measuring instrument was administered for 30 respondents for pilot testing and its reliability was Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.96$.

Open ended question for trainees and interview with trainers were also used to collect data for the purpose of triangulating and complementing the data collected using the questionnaire scales. Besides, the interview questions were used to collect information about the problems and measures to be taken for alleviating the problems in the future practice of TEP for ensuring relevant ECCE curriculum practice.

Data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The collected data through questionnaires were coded, entered, cleaned and analysed using the computer software for computing quantitative data. The quantitative data were reduced into descriptive statistics such as percentages;

frequencies and sums. In using percentages, the scores below average (scores in the I and II quartiles) are taken as low, scores between 50-75% (III quartile scores) are taken as medium, and above 75% scores (scores in IV quartile) were taken as high in the three score categories as well as for the total scores. The qualitative data were analysed summarizing the various responses obtained from respondents according to themes.

Results of the Study

In this study, it was tried to assess the benefits of teacher training program in equipping teachers with indicators of relevant curriculum practices (the guiding principles of child development and learning, the appropriateness of the curriculum for children of different ages, uniqueness and social and cultural contexts, children learning cycles, fit instructional methods and assessment means as well as suitability of learning conditions) for children. The challenges facing in making teacher education program fit for the purpose and measures to be taken to alleviate the challenges were also assessed. Data were collected using questionnaire of rating scale type with open-ended questions and interview questions. The collected data were organized and analysed focusing on the contribution of the teacher education program in acquainting ECCE teachers with 1) guiding principles, 2) the developmentally appropriate curriculum and learning cycles of children, 3) the implementation of relevant curriculum using fit instructional and assessment methods for children, and 4) the challenges in TEP to ensure fit curriculum practice for children and the measures for alleviating the problems.

The Contribution of Teacher Education Program in Acquainting Preschool Teachers with Guiding Principles of Child Development and Learning.

To implement the ECCE in line with the age levels of children, teacher education program has its own contribution in equipping preschool teachers with guiding principles of child development and learning. In line with this, the statements of twelve guiding principles were presented for the teacher-trainees to rate 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 training program in equipping teachers with the guiding principles of child development and learning presented in Table 1.

Table1

TEP Curriculum Benefits to Equip Trainees with Principles of Child

No	Criteria	Level of Agreement						Total score	
		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Sum	%
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	The Teacher Education Program (TEP) acquaints you as prospective teachers with the principles that states -----. All areas of development are important to create the whole child.	17	7.7	43	19.5	161	72.8	790	71.5
2	Development and learning follow sequential process.	18	8.1	41	18.6	162	73.3	789	71.4
3	Development and learning proceed at varying rates for every child.	15	6.8	40	18.1	166	75.1	799	72.3
4	Development and learning result from interaction of maturation and experience.	12	5.4	47	21.3	162	73.3	801	72.5
5	Early experiences affect development and learning profoundly.	17	7.7	48	21.7	156	70.6	785	71.0
6	Development and learning proceed toward complexity& self-regulation capacities.	16	7.2	45	20.4	160	72.4	791	71.6
7	Development and learning happen at best as children have secure relationships with others.	14	6.3	37	16.7	170	77.0	805	72.9
8	Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.	14	6.3	40	18.1	167	75.5	802	72.6
9	Development and learning advance when children are challenged by achievable tasks.	10	4.5	42	19.0	169	76.5	812	73.5
10	Children’s experiences shape motivation and approaches to learning	10	4.5	46	20.8	165	74.7	808	73.1
11	Children learn in a variety of ways	11	5.0	41	18.6	169	76.4	810	73.3
12	Play is a vital vehicle for promoting self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence.	11	5.0	46	20.8	164	75.4	803	72.7
Average		14	6.3	43	19.5	164	75.4	799	72.3

Development and Learning

As observed in Table 1, taking scores in the first and second quartiles (below 50% or average) as low, the scores in third quartile (50-75%) as medium and the scores in the fourth quartile (above 75%) as high, the average score of the scores was rated by 75.4% of the respondents at agreement level as to the contribution of the training in acquainting teachers with whole twelve guiding principles of child development and learning. Though many respondents agreed that the training has contribution in acquainting teachers with the guiding principles of child development and learning, reasonably high percentage of the respondents reported the contribution of the training in creating understanding of the twelve guiding principles either at disagree or neutral position. This means that about 25% of the respondents did not show agreement as the contribution of the training in creating understanding about the guiding principles taken as a whole. More specifically, in the six (principles 1, 2, 4,5, 6, and 10) out of the twelve guiding principles, more than 25% of the respondents rated the contribution of TEP in acquainting teacher-trainees with the principles at either disagreement or neutral positions. Thus, the agreement level as to the contribution of TEP in acquainting trainees with the guiding principles were found at medium level for the six guiding principles and a little more than medium level for the rest guiding principles. The total scores of the 221 respondents for all items ranged from 221 – 1105. So, the scores below $221 \times 3 = 663$ (below 50% or scores in the I and II quartiles) were rated as low, scores from 663 – 884 (50-75% or scores in III quartile) were rated as medium, and scores above $221 \times 4 = 884$ (above 75% or scores in IV quartile) were rated as high. Therefore, the contribution of TEP in equipping teachers with the guiding principles was rated at medium level (between 50-75 % or III quartile level) but not at high level for all the principles.

The Contribution of Teacher Education Program in Acquainting Preschool Teachers with Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum and Children Learning Cycles

The indicators of the three types of curriculum appropriateness and the five phases of learning cycles of children were presented for the would-be-teachers to rate indicating their position as to the level that the indicators were communicated in the training program by encircling 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 respondents are condensed in to three categories (disagree, neutral, and agree) and presented in Table 2.

Table 2
TEP Benefits in Acquainting Trainees with Relevant Curriculum for Children and Learning Cycles of Children

No	Criteria	Level of Agreement						Total score	
		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Sum	%
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
	The teacher training program acquaints you as prospective teachers with:								
I	Age-appropriate curriculum for pre-schoolers								
1	-what children like in the age range in terms of interest, abilities, skills	11	5.0	38	17.2	172	77.8	813	73.6
2	-how to develop activities and routines that accommodate the age group	10	4.5	43	19.5	168	76.0	811	73.4
3	-how to provide materials that are safe, challenging and achievable	13	5.9	37	16.7	171	77.4	808	73.1
	Average	11	5.0	39	22.2	170	77.0	808	73.1
II	Individually appropriate curriculum for pre-schoolers								
1	-the uniqueness of each child as a person	12	5.4	54	24.4	165	70.1	834	75.5
2	-the rate of growth of each child	10	4.5	40	18.1	171	77.4	814	73.7
3	-the individual learning style of each child	12	5.4	49	22.2	160	72.4	799	72.3
4	-the previous knowledge and experiences that each child brings to class	11	5.0	43	19.5	167	75.6	808	73.1
	Average	11	5.0	47	21.3	166	74.7	816	73.8
III	Socially and culturally appropriate curriculum for pre-schoolers								
1	-Culture as values, traditions, beliefs	16	7.2	37	16.7	168	76.0	799	72.3
2	-the children and families in the context of the community	14	6.3	36	16.3	171	77.4	806	72.7
3	-the family values, traditions, beliefs of each child	17	7.7	37	16.7	167	75.5	796	72.0
4	-the consequence that lack of cultural awareness leads to assumptions	12	5.4	41	18.6	168	76.0	807	73.0
	Average	15	6.8	38	17.2	169	76.3	805	72.9

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)
*TEP Benefits in Acquainting Trainees with Relevant Curriculum for Children
 and Learning Cycles of Children*

No	Criteria	Level of Agreement								
IV	Children Learning Cycles/ phases									
1	Awareness-making the child to aware about something exist (observing friends playing game)	18	8.1	51	23.1	152	68.8	779	70.5	
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	787	71.2	
3	Acquisition-making the child to ask questions to learn new information and take action.	13	5.9	53	24.0	155	70.1	792	71.7	
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	797	72.1	
5	Generalization- making the child to apply new knowledge to similar situations...	20	9.0	47	21.3	154	69.7	777	70.3	
	Average	16	7.2	49	22.2	156	70.6	799	72.3	

As observed in Table 2, taking scores in the first and second quartiles (below average score) as low, the scores in third quartile (50-75%) as medium and the scores in the fourth quartile (above 75%) as high, the average score of the scores as to the contribution of TEP in acquainting trainees with the two types of appropriateness (age and context) was rated by respondents at the fourth quartile but not at the very high percentage levels. Whereas, the contribution of TEP in acquainting about individual appropriateness was rated at medium percentage level due to the reason that teachers reported that the program did not acquaint them with the individual learning style of each child at expected level. It is also observed in Table 2 that very high percentage of respondents did not support the benefits of teacher training program in acquainting teachers with children learning cycles as expected. In all the five phases of children learning cycles, respondents rated the contribution of teacher education program in acquainting the learning cycles at medium levels between 50 – 75 %. About 27.6% up to 41.2% of the respondents rated the contribution of TEP in acquainting teachers with the five phases of children learning cycles at disagreement or neutral position. Besides, the total score in all items except one were rated at medium level by respondents.

The Contribution of Teacher Education Program in Acquainting Preschool Teachers with Curricular Activities, Methods of Instruction and Assessment Fit for Children

The prospective teachers rated the representative sample statements that indicate the contribution of pre-primary teacher education program in equipping teachers with practicing relevant curricular activities for children, application of fit instructional methods and assessment mechanisms for children 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 would-be teachers are presented in Table3.

As observed in Table 3, in many cases, the respondents did not respond in favour of the contribution of the training at high level but at medium level. It was only in five items (i.e., in addressing the whole child, individualizing program to meet individual needs, recognizing the importance of child-initiated activity, recognizing the significance of play, and asking questions about things) that the TEP was seen to be contributing to acquainting teachers at the needed level of percentages (above 75% contribution). But, the contributions of TEP were found at medium levels in the rest of the items, in that many of the respondents did not respond in favour of the contribution of TEP in equipping preschool teachers with relevant curriculum and its practice, the use of fit instructional and assessment methods for children at very high level.

In connection to this, trainees were also reporting in the open ended questions that the teaching approaches used in TEP courses did not seem to be model for the trainees' future work at pre-primary schools. This was also confirmed by trainers in the interview reporting that the TEP courses were not employing methods of teaching that go in line with the ECCE for the reason that many courses of TEP were not given by qualified teachers. Besides, it was reported that model classrooms with fit teaching aids and materials for children were not observed in the training areas (either in the institutes or other places as preschools) to practice what is learned in the training sessions at the class. Thus, the contribution of TEP in practicing relevant curriculum, applying fit instructional and assessment methods could not be realized at expected level at pre-primary schools of Ethiopia.

Table 3

The TEP in Acquainting Trainees with the Curriculum and its Practice, Fit Instruction and Assessment Methods for Children

No	Criteria	Level of Agreement							
		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Total score	
I	The TEP acquaints the prospective teachers with as how to:	f	%	f	%	F	%	sum	%
I	Curriculum Design and its practice								
1	-plan curriculum for the individual child and the group	36	16.3	50	22.6	135	61.0	726	65.7
2	-use an integrated curriculum	19	8.6	53	24.0	149	67.4	774	70.0
3	-address the whole child (physical, cognitive, social, emotional)	10	4.5	32	14.5	179	81.0	822	74.4
4	-individualize program to meet individual needs	13	5.9	32	14.5	176	79.6	813	73.6
5	-teach about mathematics and Science	15	6.8	53	24.0	153	69.2	786	71.1
6	-Teach safety practices	9	4.1	52	23.5	160	72.4	804	72.8
7	-recognize the importance of child-initiated activity	9	4.1	35	15.8	177	80.1	787	71.2
8	-recognize the significance of play	15	6.8	28	12.7	178	80.5	811	73.4
9	-engage children in activities...making them learn by doing	12	5.4	51	28.1	158	71.5	797	72.1
10	-give children choices about what they learn and how	14	6.3	48	21.7	159	72.0	794	71.9
11	-make children active participants in different tasks /activities	9	4.1	58	25.3	156	70.6	807	73.0
12	-use ongoing assessment of children and program	10	4.5	53	24.0	158	71.5	801	72.5
	Average	15	6.8	45	20.4	162	73.3	798	72;2

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

The TEP in Acquainting Trainees with the Curriculum and its Practice, Fit Instruction and Assessment Methods for Children

No	Criteria	Level of Agreement							
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	798	72.2
2	-talk about their experiences	7	3.2	57	25.8	157	71.0	806	72.9
3	-ask questions about things	8	3.6	46	20.8	167	75.6	814	73.7
4	-collect information	9	4.1	51	23.1	161	72.8	806	72.9
5	-engage in discoveries - learn by discovering of reality	10	4.5	48	21.7	163	73.7	806	72.9
6	-construct new understanding	13	5.9	50	22.6	158	71.5	795	71.9
Average		10	4.5	51	23.1	161	72.8	805	72.9
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	819	74.1
2	-individual interests	16	7.2	52	23.5	153	69.2	784	71.0
3	-coping and problem-solving skills	13	5.9	59	26.7	149	67.4	784	71.0
4	-temperament	13	5.9	51	23.1	157	71.1	796	72.0
5	-expression of family culture	17	7.7	54	24.4	150	67.9	779	70.5
6	-behaviour as a response to the environment	11	5.0	60	27.1	150	67.9	791	71.6
Average		14	6.3	54	24.4	154	68.7	792	71.7

The Challenges in Teacher Education Program for Ensuring Fit Preschool Education and Measures in Alleviating the Challenges

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

a) The Problems in Teacher Education Program for ECCE Teachers

- It was reported that some of the courses in the Teacher Education program did not seem to have correspondence with ECCE curricular activities. This means that there is mismatch between the training program of teachers and teaching at the preschools that creates obstacles in implementing relevant curriculum at the expected level. Besides, trainees were reporting that some courses are difficult to conceptualize for the courses are lacking proper organization and due to language barriers. On top of this, it was reported by both trainees and trainers that some of the modular materials were not prepared in such a way to have high benefit at pre-primary schools that result in reduced implementation of relevant curriculum at the preschools.

- Participants reported the presence of negative attitude towards the profession from the participants and the application of inappropriate approaches in the training of teachers for pre-schoolers as problems that create hindrance in implementing relevant curriculum at the preschools. Besides, it was also reported that model teaching-learning centres for developing different skills of teaching were not present in the training areas (either in the institutes or other places as preschools) for practicing what the trainees were learning in the class that create obstacle for TEP to contribute for the implementation of relevant curriculum. Furthermore, shortage of ample time for TEP, especially in-service program, created obstacle in the task of connecting the training with the ECCE activities were reported by participants of the interview.

b) Measures for Alleviating Problems of the Teacher Education Program

- Respondents reported that due to the reason that all courses in Teacher Education Program were not properly serving for the purpose, as far as possible, relevant courses that are targeted at preschool education should be selected and included in the program for the teacher-trainees in the future.

- Revision of the courses of the TEP that were not suitable for the work at hand and the modular materials for the difficult courses by qualified teachers were suggested by respondents to minimize the problem. Besides, well qualified human resources for the TEP are highly expected in all specialty areas as reported by respondents.

- The development of positive attitude towards the profession needs high attention in the future in that, for instance, arranging short term training for newly graduates about the profession and taking care in screening those trainees with positive attitude at the start.

- The interviewees reported that to enhance the contribution of TEP for curriculum practice at the pre-primary schools, there should be opportunities for trainees that enable them to develop different skills in practicing the application of appropriate teaching approaches and the preparation of teaching materials, and providing sufficient time for the practice in the future at the training institutes with the help of qualified professionals. Besides, it was reported that it would be good to conduct training using local language or mother tongue that

could make it easy for the trainees in order to apply the knowledge at the ground level.

Discussion

The contribution of teacher education program (TEP) in acquainting trainees with the guiding principles was found at medium level for the all guiding principles. Thus, the TEP did not contribute at the expected high level in acquainting trainees with the guiding principles of child development and learning. This result did not go in line with the idea of Kostenik et al. (2012) and Bredekamp and Copple (1997) that states the teacher education program is expected to enable trainee-teachers to have profound understanding about the twelve guiding principles of child development and learning at very high level. Therefore, one can understand from this fact that the TEP has limitation to equip teachers of the pre-primary schools with all the guiding principles of child development and learning at the expected high levels.

The teacher education program has to contribute its part in equipping pre-primary school teachers with the concept of developmentally appropriate curriculum for children and children learning cycles to promote the curriculum practice. But, the contribution of TEP in acquainting trainees with the three types of appropriateness and cycles of children learning was not favoured by very high percentage levels of respondents. Mainly, some items in the three types of appropriateness did not indicate the contribution of TEP in acquainting teachers with age, individual and cultural appropriateness of the curriculum. This fact is more pronounced in the case of individual appropriateness. The fact did not go in line with the idea of Bredekamp and Copple (1997) that states the teacher training program should create profound understanding about the age, individual, and cultural appropriateness of the curriculum for pre-schoolers. Thus, the contribution of TEP in acquainting trainees with the three types of appropriateness needs to get due attention in the future. Similarly, the results obtained about contributions of TEP in acquainting teachers with learning cycles of children did not go in line with the idea of Kostenik et al. (2012) that states the teacher education program is expected to enable teachers to have profound understanding about the five learning phases or cycles of children at very high level for the fact that effective teaching at pre-primary schools demands teachers to follow the five learning cycles of children. Thus, the training did not enable teachers to be competent in following the five phases of children learning in guiding, coaching, and teaching preschool children.

It is also expected from the teacher education program to contribute its part in equipping ECCE teachers with the necessary knowledge as how to practice relevant curricular activities, apply fit methods of instruction and assessment means for children to promote curriculum practice. But, the contributions of the training for the mentioned purposes were not arriving at the expected level of benefits as perceived by trainees. 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 in using

different fit approaches of assessing development and learning of children. The obtained results are different from the idea of Kostenik et al. (2012) that states 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 pre-schoolers at profound level.

As to problems faced in teacher education program in its contribution for the implementation of preschool curriculum, respondents reported that some courses in the teacher education program did not match with the ECCE curriculum and some others are difficult to conceptualize for the trainees. Besides, lack of positive attitude towards the profession, the use of unfit approaches, absence of model teaching-learning centres, and shortage of time for the training were cited as serious problems. Thus, the problems create obstacle for TEP in order not to contribute to relevant ECCE curriculum practice as expected in practicing curriculum at preschools. Besides, if the trainees have negative attitude towards the profession and model approaches fit for the trainees were not used, the use of TEP to contribute to implementing relevant curriculum would not be possible at preschools. The presence of centres for practicing different skills of teaching (either in the institutes or other places as preschools) would be so essential for the trainees to try out what they learn in the class in order to enhance the contribution of the training to the proper implementation of relevant curriculum at preschools.

The inclusion of fit courses for the purpose, revision of the existing courses and modular materials for the courses, boosting the positive attitudes of trainees towards the profession, developing different fit skills for teaching, provision of sufficient training time, fulfilling qualified professionals for the program were reported as measures for making TEP to contribute for the implementation of relevant curriculum at preschools of Ethiopia. If these measures are taken in to account, the training might contribute its parts in the proper implementation of fit curriculum for children

Summary and Conclusions

In studying “the contribution of Teacher Education Program in equipping teachers with indicators of relevant curriculum in Ethiopia”, attempts were made to assess the benefits of TEP in acquainting teachers with guiding principles; concept of relevant and appropriate curriculum and its practice; fit instructional and assessment methods for children; and the challenges in ensuring that TEP contributes to ECCE curriculum practice and the measures for alleviating the problems. In doing so, a survey study approach was followed and data were collected from teacher-trainees and trainers using questionnaire of rating scale types with open-ended questions, and an interview. In analysing the quantitative data, simple descriptive statistics were used. While for qualitative data, rules of logic were employed. The results are summarized as follows.

- The assessment on the Teacher Education Program contribution in acquainting teachers with the basic principles revealed that the contribution of the program is not realized at the expected very high level. This is for the fact that teacher training program is expected to enable teachers to have very high level of understanding about the twelve guiding principles of child learning and development.
- The teacher-trainee respondents did not report high level of agreement as to the contribution of the teacher education program in acquainting teachers with the three types of appropriateness: age appropriateness, individual appropriateness and context appropriateness. The training program has limitation in creating proper awareness about the three types of appropriateness for teachers.
- The contribution of Teacher Education Program in acquainting preschool teachers with the five phases/cycles of children learning was not rated highly by respondents as expected in the study areas. The training program has limitations in helping teachers to become competent in teaching children following the five learning cycles of children. The TEP has limitations in making preschool teachers competent in implementing developmentally relevant curriculum, employing fit methods of instruction, and using different approaches of assessing the development and learning of children.
- It was reported in the interview that the delivery of courses in the Teacher Education Program with the use of fit methods was not conducted by model qualified teachers with the use of suitable curriculum materials. It was also reported that some courses were difficult to conceptualize for the trainees. Besides, lack of positive attitude towards the profession from the participants, absence of model skill development centres, and shortage of time in naturalizing concepts were reported as obstacles in the teacher education program contribution for implementing relevant curriculum. Thus, the teacher education program has limitation to acquaint trainees with the application of teaching methods by model teachers following guiding principles.

Recommendations

On the basis of the results of the study, to use the TEP in making the preschool curriculum practice relevant for the children, the following points should be taken in to account in the future as conclusions of the study.

-The Teacher Education Program should include courses that would contribute to the actual practice at ground level in the preschool setting considering the limitations of the courses in acquainting preschool teachers with needed knowledge.

- The teacher education program courses need revision in the future by qualified teachers to have appropriate curriculum with suitable modular materials. It was reported that shortage of time to naturalize the skills as problems of teacher

education program can be alleviated by upgrading the program to the degree level. Ample time for TEP, especially for the in-service program, should be thought to reduce obstacle in the training of teachers for pre-schoolers. The negative attitude of trainees towards the profession, lack of model skill development centres should be considered in the future and if the program is up grading to the degree level in the future.

- Generally, the professional courses should equip trainees with guiding principles of child development and learning, developmentally appropriate curriculum and its practice, children learning cycles, and the fit instructional and assessment methods for preschool children in the training program. Moreover, it seems advisable to minimize difficulty level of the courses.

- On top of this, further study about the alignment of teacher education program and early childhood development and education curriculum seems so important for enhancing future better benefits of the teacher education program.

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