

# Pre-primary School Teacher Training Program in Kotebe University of Education: Provision and Policy Implications

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## Abstract

If someone plans to build a house, she/he needs to lay the foundation that supports the entire structure. A similar foundation is mandatory before a child enters primary school. Pre-primary education provides a stimulating environment for the physical, intellectual, linguistic, social, and emotional development of children. In that regard, this study explores the provision of the pre-primary teacher training program at the Kotebe University of Education. The research uses a qualitative case study. Data were gathered from the Ministry of education, Kotebe University of Education, and Addis Ababa city education bureau through interviews, observation, and document analysis. Six key informants were purposely selected, and a thematic data analysis technique was employed to analyze the qualitative data. The findings indicated that the pre-primary teacher training program is critically challenged by the shortage of trainers, financial and material constraints, inconclusiveness of the selection criteria of trainees', overcrowded workshops, and absence of connections with social service-providing organizations. Regardless of policy interventions, the pre-primary school teachers' qualification framework is not considered yet. Thus, the program requires the attention of every concerned stakeholder. Hence, the training college, the city education bureau, and the education planners need to prioritize the provision of quality training for pre-primary school teachers. The national quality framework of pre-primary teacher education should also be considered in order to measure the quality of training programs offered in multiple teacher training institutes.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 17 April 2022

Accepted 23 June 2022

## KEYWORDS

Pre-primary education, pre-primary school teacher training, provision, teacher training college

## Introduction

Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (ETP) addresses the educational goals of the nation from pre-primary education (PPE) through higher education levels. The policy document in general has given considerable attention to the education of primary-grade children (1-8) (TGE, 1994). Preparing a child for primary schooling requires providing quality pre-primary education. Because whenever one plans to build a house, it is necessary to lay a foundation stone to support the entire structure. Thus, before a child enters primary school, a similar foundation must be laid at the kindergarten level. According to Khan (1993), the successful education of a child depends upon the foundation stones laid during the pre-school years. He rightly argued that

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children learn fundamental skills and develop the ways that are crucial to the success of their future education in their early years. Thus, one can understand that early childhood is a critical period in human life which requires due attention and a great deal of investment.

Pre-primary education is found to be the most vital area of human capital investment, which maximizes opportunities to make commitments toward a wide range of initiatives to build a person in the early years (Soytas, 2016; Young, 2002). Considering this, ETP included early childhood education in the structure of the education policy document stating that “kindergarten will focus on the all-round development of a child in preparation for formal schooling” (TGE, 1994, p.14). This indicates that though designing a policy alone is not sufficient, the provision of quality pre-primary education is a critical issue and will remain one of the current development agendas in the education system.

Since the high level of political support stimulates the accomplishment of the educational goals of early childhood care and education (UNESCO, 2007), investing in pre-primary education requires strong political commitment and cooperation (Doryan, Cautam, & Foege 2002). Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) requires political emphasis during policy formulation and implementation. However, as the evidence indicated, the attention from the government to the ECCE teacher’s training is inadequate mainly due to a lack of necessary resources (Biniyam, 2014; Garcia, Pence, & Euans, 2008). Regardless of policy imitative, especially the pre-primary school teachers’ training program is being ignored by the incident. This is mainly the case in Ethiopia wherein there is a less specified strategy for the expansion of pre-primary school teacher training centers (e.g., Biniyam, 2014). Evidently, due to insufficient resource provisions, pre-primary education and its teacher training programs are not given adequate emphasis throughout the nation (Biniyam, 2014; MoE, 2006). It has been set as a standard that pre-primary school teachers should hold a ten-month pre-primary school teacher training certificate which later was upgraded to a three-year diploma after consolidated courses from the training institutes (Biniyam, 2014). However, this is facing a problem due to a shortage of institutes to provide training for pre-primary school teachers (ibid).

The aforementioned idea is highly linked to the issue of prioritization. Pre-primary education receives comparatively low priority from the Ministry of Education compared to primary education. The provision of primary education in turn depends on the provision of quality pre-primary education. Since pre-primary education is a foundation for the promotion of the ‘holistic’ and well-balanced development of a child (UNESCO, 2006), prioritizing pre-primary education is mandatory in schooling activities, which in turn calls for an integrated effort of various sectors through policies to provide quality teacher training programs. Since teachers are central in the process of education, any attempt to provide the best education is logically associated with the teacher’s capacity-building activities.

This in turn needs attention to design policies and set proper implementing strategies to train sufficient and qualified teachers for pre-primary schools. To this end, the present study is designed to explore the provision of the pre-primary teacher training program at the Kotebe University of Education, the only university of education holding a pre-primary school teacher training department in Ethiopia.

## Statement of the Problem

Providing pre-primary school education programs of various sorts for children below the official school-going age is vital to prepare them for primary education. As indicated by UNESCO (2006), the main objective of pre-primary education is the all-rounded development of children in order to prepare them for formal schooling. Having this objective into consideration, the Ethiopian government has put its commitment to promoting pre-primary education through policies that enhance investment in pre-primary programs by the private sector and religious organizations. However, this policy initiative could not be extended to the provision of teachers' training. The government's role in primary education is limited mainly to setting standards, developing curricula, training teachers, and providing supervisory support (MoE, 2010b; Demeke, 2006).

On the other hand, early childhood is a critical period that requires due attention and visible cooperation from all the stakeholders (UNICEF, 2007). In addition to the education sector, ECCE needs to have a strong connection with other sectors and policies like health and social welfare, and economic sectors (ibid). To this end, policy documents on health, education, and social welfare articulate statements that uphold the protection, care, health, and optimal development of a child within their sphere of influence.

Though the degree of contribution varies, these sectors are playing a great role in the development of children. The problem here is the lack of integration among the policies of these sectors. The health policy of Ethiopia (TGE, 1993) promotes and encourages the provision of care facilities and management of common childhood diseases (Article 10.6); whereas, ETP proclaims the provision of ECCE focusing on all-rounded development and preparation for formal education (Article 3.2.1). Similarly, the development and social welfare policy (TGE, 1996) promised to implement the international and regional conventions as well as legal instruments concerning the rights of children which Ethiopia has already ratified (Article 5.1.3). Thus, the purpose of the integrated policies is mainly to provide access to training to teachers who work in an ECCE setting with the necessary skills to meet the basic needs of young children in all areas of their development (physical, mental, emotional, and social) (Atmore, Lauren-Jayne, & Michaela, 2012). Integration is vital in every level of early childhood education including teacher training programs for the implementation of a better and integrated curriculum with the diversification of courses and teaching methodologies in teacher training programs. On top of this, the National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education of 2010 is built around four pillars (MoE, 2010b). The first two pillars, parental education and a comprehensive program of early child health and stimulation are focused on children from the prenatal period up to age 3 and fall under the roles of the Ministry of Health (ibid). In general, taking pre-primary schools as the administrative hub for integrated early childhood education, nutrition, and health services required integrated policy efforts to provide various social services. However, the practice informs us that, the integrations among the mentioned policies are less-tightened together and not well-thought-out in pre-primary school teacher training programs.

In addition to loosened integration of policies, the provision of pre-primary education in Ethiopia is facing a number of challenges including limited access and a lack of quality education. The participation of children in pre-primary programs is remained low as compared to the

population of children who are supposed to have been enrolled mainly due to poverty (UNESCO, 2007). Furthermore, the shortage of pre-primary school teachers with expected qualifications has highly affected the provision of the program (MoE, 2010a). Teacher training is one way of enhancing the quality and status of the profession of teaching. As noted by Maekelech (2002), “even when a more relevant curriculum is developed, school outcomes and students’ performance depend to a great extent on the availability of sufficient teachers and their energy, motivation, and talent” (p. 3). This is also true for Girma (2014) who sorted out that the achievement of a child’s holistic development in pre-primary schools is mainly dependent on the teachers’ understanding of how to implement the curriculum.

Regardless of the facility in which a child is placed, a quality teacher can provide a learning environment in which a child can develop optimally and in a holistic manner (Atmore, et al, 2012). Thus, since teachers are key factors of success in education, teacher certification and program accreditation are helpful in preparing and qualifying pre-primary school teachers. However, to produce quality ECCE teachers, various training and education opportunities are mandatorily expected to be available through full ECCE teachers’ qualification programs (ibid). But as stated in the education sector review (ESDP IV), one of the main challenges of the pre-primary education sub-sector is the shortage in the average number of qualified pre-primary school teachers (MoE, 2010a).

Statistically, the share of trained pre-primary school teachers declined to 37 percent in 2008/09 showing that though one of the quality indicators is teachers’ qualification, about 63 percent of teachers are not trained to teach at the pre-primary school level (Yisak & Camfield, 2009). This has an indication of the severity of the qualified pre-primary school teachers’ shortage at the national level. My closer observation of private pre-primary schools in Addis Ababa reveals that most of the pre-primary school teachers are either unqualified in pre-primary school teaching or graduated from fields outside the pre-primary school teaching professions. While most early childhood education teachers have no qualifications, few have received specific short-term training on how to handle children of early ages. A recent report on pre-primary education also showed that only 22% of pre-primary teachers are appropriately qualified and held the ECCE Diploma at the national level in 2019 (MoE, 2020a). Consequently, both parents and teachers are often complaining about the shortage of teachers with appropriate qualifications. Furthermore, although the number of pre-primary schools is increasing every year, the government is responding very slowly to the serious shortage of qualified pre-primary school teachers for young children (ibid). Even if the government has promised to play a critical role in policy development, curriculum designing, standard setting, and training of teachers (TGE, 1994), the training centers are not creating sufficient pre-primary school teachers. The government’s strategy that left an expansion of pre-primary school education to private sector organizations, NGOs, and community-based institutions was unsuccessful mainly due to a shortage of qualified pre-primary school teachers (Yisak & Camfield, 2009; MoE, 2020a).

In addition to coverage and access, the provision of quality education is a challenge in pre-primary education programs. The existing services do suffer from poor quality which resulted in poor preparation of teachers and poor provision of facilities (UNESCO, 2007). Though a lack of

pre-primary school teachers is challenging the provision of quality pre-primary school education, the focus of the government on the issue looked disinclined (Hoot et al., 2004). This was also supported by Yekoyealem, Teka, Desta, Daniel, and Girma (2016) that the lack of adequate and pertinent training for pre-primary school teachers was a major problem facing the provision of quality pre-primary education mainly resulting from a shortage of institutions to train pre-primary school teachers. Consequently, teachers working in the “O” grades were placed among those who have trained for the first primary education training (Yekoyealem et al, 2016).

Regardless of the problem, all the private pre-primary teacher training institutions in Addis Ababa are officially closed and ceased the training program since 2009/10. Evidently, the private teacher training programs are closed following government decisions (ibid). This in turn created a burden on a single education university providing the pre-primary school teacher training program in the capital city. With regard to this, the study revealed that the majority of the pre-primary school teachers had certificates and did not meet the minimum qualification requirements as stipulated in the Ethiopian pre-primary education strategy (MoE, 2010b). Besides, there is a lack of in-service training for teachers and principals, and pre-primary school teachers are not getting adequate in-service training (Hailu, 2019; Rahel, 2014).

Moreover, many of the studies conducted on the current situation of pre-primary education in different areas of the country found that the implementation of pre-primary education programs was mainly challenged by a shortage of pre-primary school teachers qualified for the required level (Mamo, 2014; Admasu, 2014; Yigzaw & Abdirahman, 2017). On the other hand, Biniyam (2014) examined the policy provisions, practices, and challenges of Early Childhood Care and Education of teachers training at Kotebe University College (KUC). This research examined the perceptions of professionals on the policy provisions in ECCE teachers’ training at the university college. The mentioned study found that ECCE teachers’ training at KUC lacks the required quality. However, this study did not analyze the level of government intervention to curve the policy and practice challenges that the training provision is practically facing. Different from this, the present study mainly focuses on the interventions made by the government to mitigate the problems and the practices of the training provisions from the admission of the candidates to the assignment of the training to practicum teaching.

In general, the present study mainly treats the following research questions. (1) What do the practices of the provision of pre-primary school teachers’ training activities look like at Kotebe University of Education? (2) How is the government intervention help to mitigate the challenges that interfere with the provision of pre-primary school teachers’ training programs? (3) What challenges hinder the implementation of the pre-primary school teachers’ training program at the Kotebe University of Education?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is intended to explore the provision of the pre-primary teacher training program at the Kotebe University of Education through analyses of the policy documents and data gathered from interviews of the key informants to understand the challenges and policy implications. Thus, the findings would help early childhood education planners, policymakers and program designers

gain an understanding of the extent to which their efforts to provide pre-primary teacher training programs are noticeable at the policy level. Specifically, the findings have a crucial message for pre-primary education experts and program designers as well as curriculum developers to evaluate the provision of the program and to identify major gaps that may require urgent interventions.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

Conceptually, the study is delimited to the existing practices and challenges facing the provision of pre-primary teacher training programs. The study also looks at intervention strategies that the government undertakes to mitigate the challenges during the provision of pre-primary school teachers' training programs in practice. Furthermore, the study is delimited and bounded to investigate the case only at the Kotebe University of Education, College of education and behavioral studies based on its long-time experience in the provision of pre-primary school teachers' training.

## **Methods**

This study employed qualitative case study design. Case studies put emphasis on the detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships (INTED, 2012). The design used to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods (Yin, 1984). It facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within the context using a variety of data sources. A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources to enhance data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003).

So, the potential data sources of this study were the key informants from the Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa City Administration Education Bureau, and the department of pre-primary school teacher training program at the Kotebe University of Education. The respondents include pre-primary teacher training experts in MoE, the pre-primary school training program experts, teacher development coordinators from Addis Ababa city education bureau, and the pre-primary school department head and pre-primary school teachers' trainer at Kotebe University of Education. The study subjects were selected purposely considering their responsibility to the training program and their expertise to obtain information about pressing issues in the pre-primary school teacher training activities. Generally, six key informants (experts and program coordinators) were purposely included by non-probability sampling technique to participate in providing information through interview since they are the ones who have got a strong attachment to the program implementation due to their responsibility.

The data-gathering instruments employed in the study were document analysis, observation, and interview. The document analysis was employed to collect data from various policy documents including the education and training policy, the ESDPs IV, V, and VI, the national policy framework, and reports about the implementation strategies, standards, and procedures of the training program. The observation was used to gather information from the training college about the current status of workshop materials, and teaching facilities.

Furthermore, data were collected from experts and the department head through structured and unstructured interviews.

After the required data have been collected, various data analysis procedures have been followed. Accordingly, I read and organized the data from each question separately so as to focus on one question at a time. Then the explanations were grouped and categorized by themes, topics, or categories. For the analysis of the structured interviews, the transcribed interviews were initially auto-coded based on the direct question asked in the interview schedule, and then analyzed thematically to provide a more grounded analysis of the qualitative data. Based on an initial analysis of the answers to the questions, a framework was developed for ongoing coding. The initial coding framework was around the following codes: *Selection Criteria, Curriculum Development, Teaching Methodology, Professionalization, Promotional Possibilities, School Facilities, and Pre-primary Education Policies*. Thus, the codes were refined and re-read to form the transcript coding of the themes identified. Then after, the transcripts have been divided into groups of events that differ in important characteristics related to the program to make the kinds of comparisons in the analysis plan.

After all of these steps, interpreting the analyzed data from the appropriate perspective was used to determine the significance and implications of the data. Therefore, the data analysis in this study followed the steps such as reading through all the data and organizing explanations into similar categories, identifying the patterns and associations in the themes, and finally, labeling the categories or themes.

## Results

### Selection of Trainees

Here, it is relevant to raise a question related to the way trainees are recruited and who is recruiting them. Dependably, the recruitment of candidates for pre-primary school training is the responsibility of the training college. As evidenced by the interviewee in the college;

the recruiting process in the college is somewhat varied. For the primary teachers, the city education bureau sends the selected trainees list and the department selected from each sub-city. However, in the case of Pre-primary school teachers, the recruiting responsibility lies on the shoulder of the college. The city education bureau has no contribution in the selection of trainees (R1, June 2017).

The major issue related to the selection process of the trainees is the set criteria the university used during the admission of the trainees. It is found that the only criteria employed during admission of the trainees were the candidates' high school Grade Point Average (GPA) and their grade 10 and grade 12 transcript result. In this regard, the respondents from the teacher training college were not satisfied with the current selection criteria. The department head and the trainers reported that "mostly what [we] (the department) suggesting is to use the variety of methods to select the trainees including, work experience, age, entrance exams, medical exams, and discipline as useful criteria for the entries" (R1 & R4, June 2017). Accordingly, the experience

of trainees was not considered in the selection process. Thus, it is difficult to evaluate the interest, language proficiency as well as pictorial, and handwriting abilities of the trainees during the selection process.

On the other hand, the experts from the city education bureau argued that “since the total number of applicants is large, it is difficult to conduct and manage entrance exams through interviews and written forms” (R2 & R5, June 2017). Although entrance exam has been suggested by the department to be employed as a selection criterion, it is not yet implemented in the selection process. This in turn has been affecting the quality of the training program since there is difficulty in identifying the language proficiency and required skills of the trainees; it is even difficult to identify the gaps to be filled during the training.

### **Professional Development and Promotional Possibilities**

This part of the study elaborates the trends of promoting pre-primary teaching as a profession and the possible opportunities for teachers’ career development. One progressive way for teachers to obtain initial qualification is a multi-month pre-school training certificate so that they can upgrade their skills to fully qualified ECCE teacher status over time (Orkin, Workeneh & Woodhead, 2012). To produce quality ECCE teachers, various training opportunities are needed to be availed through full ECCE qualifications, and through short-term skills development programs. In practice, pre-primary school teacher training is directly or indirectly linked with the policy and strategy of the nation’s education system. The policies influence professional development practices by articulating the regulations and accountability, allocation of resources, setting out structural frameworks, and quality control mechanisms (Vargas-Baron, 2005). Thus, the policy document is a vital area in the determination of the provision of quality pre-primary teacher training programs.

Undeniably, proper schooling cannot be conceived without the presence of qualified teachers. Although teacher education has a long history of training teachers, unlike other levels of education, the idea of formal pre-primary school teacher training is a relatively recent phenomenon. To this end, the lack of qualified trainers in teachers’ colleges has resulted in a shortage of qualified and trained teachers. Consequently, most pre-primary school teachers are untrained or have very limited and unrelated training. Similar findings are also obtained by Kassahun (2013), which revealed the irrelevance of the existing pre-primary school teachers’ qualifications. In the same study, it is noted that in Ethiopia trainees join pre-primary school teachers’ training colleges when they do not have options or opportunities to pursue higher education studies in other professions. This in turn has a negative implication on continual professional development.

According to the participants, there are some hopeful attempts to develop and improve teacher training programs. As has been replied by the participants from the teacher training college, “the provision of the training program is improving” (R1 & R4, June 2017). Accordingly, efforts have been made at least to include the pre-primary teachers’ training program in education policy, and the framework has been prepared. Though, inadequate, further training opportunities have been arranged for teachers who are working at government and private preschools.

However, the respondent strongly argued that “the contribution of the government especially, in teacher training programs is invisible” (R1, June 2017). Evidently:

there is a shortage of modern technologies and relevant facilities for updating and training the trainers; they have only limited opportunities for further education in the area since the higher educational institution is not furthering the pre-primary teacher training program; the salary for pre-primary school teachers is not attractive and the trainees’ opportunity for the cost-sharing services is unlikely (R1, June 2017).

As result, the shortage of qualified teachers becomes practical which in turn inhibited the accessibility of the program. There is a clear absence of continuous professional development and ongoing support available for teachers.

On the contrary, experts from the city education bureau strongly argued that the program is relatively successful. They believed that fruitful evidence is stirring in this sub-sector. Accordingly, “the policies and strategies are designed to be used as frameworks all over the sub-sector, and teacher training is intended to provide quality education for the trainees” (R3, June 2017).

Financing pre-primary education was another theme presented during the data analysis considering its contribution to promoting the pre-primary school teacher’s profession. Concerning the financing of pre-primary teacher education, a respondent from the education bureau strongly argued that:

Since the government is not hiring trainees after the completion of the training program, the cost-sharing system is not a concern at this level. But for the overall program, the college is responsible to budget, program, and schedule its financial demand through a formal structure without expecting special treatment from the government for the program (R2, June 2017).

Undeniably, the shortage of school facilities and qualified trainers is a challenge to the pre-primary teacher training program. In light of this, the experts rightly argued that since one of the major objectives of the education bureau is supporting and facilitating the training program, it intends to develop a collaborative effort to provide an effective training program in the near future. To this end, the participants promised that “though the formal future plan is not yet officially introduced, the education bureau is planning to establish strong relations with the university to strengthen the program, and evaluate its implementation” (R3, June 2017). From this, one can understand that a career development strategy and professional development programs are not specified. Comparatively, there is a low salary structure and inconsiderate incentive system in the sector which in turn floods the interest of teaching staff in preschool sectors as a career path. Consistent with this, Rahel (2014) found low teachers’ salaries and high turnover as challenges of kindergarten education provision. Consequently, new teachers often consider teaching in pre-primary schools only as a stepping stone for career opportunities other than teaching, and the sector is exposed to turnover.

## Curriculum Development and Teaching Methodology

Curriculum development is a critical aspect of an educational program (Belete, & Hoot, 2005). The pre-primary education curriculum is designed to meet broad national educational objectives. It is used as a guideline for the scope and coverage of each content, time allotted and activities to be included during the course. In this regard, I reviewed the document prepared centrally for training colleges and institutions and interviewed the respondents on the issue. According to the respondents, the designed curriculum is currently used as a guideline for the course and its objectives, the time allocation for each course, and its scope. The realization of the curriculum is facing a challenge due to a lack of a facilitated classroom environment and a shortage of practically skilled trainers who are committed to apply an active method of teaching.

According to the respondent from the training college, “there is a mismatch between what trainees are learning and expected to teach as has been observed during the practicum program” (R1, June 2017). For instance, the interviewee argued, “most private pre-primary schools are using English as instructional media which is not included in the curriculum of the teacher training program” (R1, June 2017). Consistent with this, the research findings of Yekoyealem et al. (2016) also indicated the lack of conformity to national standards in the curriculum. The contradiction is that the training program in the college is being conducted using the Amharic language as the instructional media. On the contrary, private pre-primary schools use English as a medium of instruction.

Regarding the methodology of the training program, principally, the active learning method is the most advisable and critically emphasized method in the syllabus to train teachers of very young children, where education is inclusively expected to be practical and game-oriented (MoE, 2010b). However, its implementation has been jammed due to the shortage of necessary resources required to run the program. In relation to this, the respondent from the college said that “it [the training] especially should be learner-oriented for the teachers of very young children” (R1, June 2017). However, this is less practical on the ground due to the background of the trainees, large class size, shortage of teaching facilities, as well as lack of teachers’ readiness and willingness. Consequently, these challenges influenced the teachers to rely on a teacher-centered training approach.

On the other hand, some attempts are made during a practicum session, where trainees are exposed to the actual teaching practice. According to the respondent, the teaching practice has a one-month duration in pre-primary schools which is followed by discussions focusing on “the general practices, challenges faced during real work practice, the nature of work and its environment, interaction with students, staff and the school management” (R4, June 2017). However, “finance-related problems and shortage of supervisors to assess continuous practical improvement are challenging the practicum program.” (R1, June 2017).

## School Facilities

It is true that school facilities play a vital role in the provision of education and training programs. It is impossible to expect quality outputs without supplying quality inputs and resources

in education the process of education. Thus, to ensure the success of the training the provision of important facilities is very crucial. In this regard interviews were conducted; some documents were analyzed, and observation was undertaken. Accordingly, it is found that the pre-primary school teacher training program is not physically facilitated with the required teaching and learning resources. It is facing challenges in relation to shortage of necessary teaching materials including textbooks, classroom facilities, practical workshops, and facilities.

According to the respondent from the training college, students are always complaining about photocopy costs. Additionally, there is difficulty in supporting the training program with modern technologies due to lack of ICT facilities in the college. As far as my classroom and workshop observation is concerned, the training center has only one workshop room for practice purposes. It is crowded with other materials which are unrelated to the objectives of the program. Strengthening my observation, the respondent added that “since there is a shortage in learning classrooms, we are teaching a large number of students within crowded rooms” (R4, June 2017). Thus, the space problem is the everyday reality; there is no pedagogic center for teaching aids; the playground is crowded, and the workshop hall is very loaded.

### **The Connections among Institutions**

The connection between the city education bureau and the training college is one of the issues raised during the interview session. There were no interactive connections between the education bureau and the training college regardless of the coordinated responsibilities to make closer networks. According to an expert from the city education bureau, the connection between these institutions is “limited and invisible” (R3, June 2017). Their connection doesn’t go beyond the meetings and proposal presentation sessions when there is a sort of change in the program implementation. This shows that there is a great structural gap that creates problems in facilitating and coordinating the training program. Additionally, the connection of the training center with other sectors and NGOs is almost nonexistent except few unintended and urgent relations for seminars and consultative meetings with the sub-cities.

The respondent from the training college believed that the connection with different supporting social organizations and the training college is “limited and selective”. The respondent added that “it has fewer cooperative connections with health, social, women, children and labor affairs bureaus” (R6, June 2017). Similarly, its network with private pre-primary schools is less interactive and limited only to practicum programs.

Another point raised in this part is training opportunities for the trainers. Accordingly, “there was no long or short-term training program conducted for the staff” (R6, June 2017). This in turn critically affects the improvement and development of the training program.

### **The National Education and Training Policy and Intervention Strategies**

The National Policy of Education, which emerged in 1994, encompasses overall and specific objectives, and implementation strategies, including formal and non-formal education, from kindergarten up to higher education levels. The policy incorporates the structure of education

in relation to the development of student profiles, educational measurement and evaluation, media of instruction and language teaching at various levels, the recruitment, training, methodology, organization, professional ethics, and career development of teachers (TGE, 1994). The document presents national objectives which include:

The promotion of relevant and appropriate education and training through formal and non-formal programs, provision of basic education and integrated knowledge at various levels of vocational training provision of education that can produce citizens who stand for democratic unity, liberty, equality, dignity, and justice, and who are endowed with moral values, etc. (TGE, 1994, pp. 7-11).

Thus, the objectives for pre-primary education were derived from these national goals. Accordingly, kindergarten education plays an important role in “all-rounded development” in a child’s preparation for formal schooling (TGE, 1994, p. 14). To this end, the policy expresses high expectations for its implementation from all stakeholders including the parents. The early childhood period before primary school is critical that needs to be the area of focus. However, the government has no direct investment at this level (Hoot, Szente & Belete, 2004; Tekeste, 1996; UNESCO, 2006). Principally, it has clearly outlined the objectives of pre-primary education including a smooth transition from home to school, preparing the child for the primary level of education, and providing adequate care and supervision for the children (TGE, 1994).

To ensure the effective implementation of the analyzed policy, education sector development programs, and frameworks have been designed at different times. These include all the education sector development programs like ESDP IV (from 2010/11- 2014/15), ESDP V (2015/16- 2019/20), and ESDP VI (2020/21- 2024/25). These programs are aimed at increasing access, improving quality, increasing effectiveness, achieving equity, and expanding finance at all levels of education (ADEA, 2000). They are crucially applied to translate education and training policy into practice. It has been narrated that:

The ESDP is a twenty-year education sector indicative plan that translates the 1994 Education and Training Policy (ETP) into action through long and medium-term planning cycles. It is a sector-wide approach that encompasses all the education and training programs of Ethiopia - spanning from pre-primary education to tertiary education (Mollaw, 2018, p.17).

The detail of the accomplishments of the ESDPs is beyond the scope of this study. Undeniably, however, these programs have played a role in improving the provision of early childhood education. Especially, since the ESDP IV (2010 to 2014/15), ECCE received much focus, which provides a useful analysis of lessons learned from the previous ESDPs. Relatively, tangible program outcomes and targets were set in ESDP IV more than the preceding ESDPs using different approaches to meet the objective of ECCE as specified in the education for all documents (Tsegai, 2015). As a success story, in the final year of ESDP IV, some Colleges of Teacher Education began multi-year diploma-level training programs for pre-primary school teachers (MoE, 2015).

The ESDP V also targeted a multi-year diploma for pre-primary teachers to aggressively continue to strengthen and expand the program to all colleges of teacher education (ibid). However, in the reality, regardless of the efforts to enhance the quality and access of pre-primary education, pre-primary teachers holding the ECCE diploma remained only 15% at the end of the ESDP V (MoE, 2020b). The rapid expansion of pre-primary education, particularly O-Classes, raises concern regarding the serious demand for pre-primary school teachers. As the result, primary school teachers are using available periods to provide O-Class instruction. Despite the existence of these efforts for the inclusion of ECCE in the ESDPs, ECCE teacher training was one of the most neglected areas (MoE, 2010b). Taking this into consideration, in 2010, UNICEF along with the concerned ministries (mainly the Ministry of education, the Ministry of health, and the Ministry of women children, and youth affairs), developed a national policy framework for pre-primary education. The basis for the ECCE policy framework is the National Education and Training Policy (ibid). The policy framework recognizes the pre-primary school teacher as the main responsible person for the pre-primary education program and designates the Ministry of Education as the responsible institution for the training of pre-primary school teachers (MoE, 2010b).

In nutshell, a national policy framework of ECCE 2010 has clearly indicated the expectations and roles of the government in the pre-primary school teachers' training systems and certification. Yet as stated during the interview session with participants of the study, the identified policy statements were not put into practice. Besides, the outcome of the education and training policy has been critically analyzed in recent times. The evidence identifies the challenge of low quality at all levels of education, including pre-primary education (Challa, 2020). In association with this, the newly drafted national education and training policy (FDRE, 2020) has declared pre-primary education to be free and compulsory. The draft policy also determines that the training institutions need to train ECCE teachers via their relevant mother tongue up to the diploma level after completion of grade twelve. Regardless of the efforts to strengthen pre-primary school teachers' training, the national pre-primary school teachers' training and education policy and national quality framework are not formulated yet. Thus, since there is no national quality framework on pre-primary teacher education, it is not possible to measure the quality of training programs offered in multiple teacher training institutes.

## Discussion

Early childhood education is the least developed sub-sector in Ethiopia. The government has assumed responsibility for issuing the policy directives, setting the standards for curriculum, supporting teachers' training, supervising, and licensing the pre-primary education institutions (MoE, 2006). However, the finding showed that the training program is bounded by a number of challenges including a shortage in human resources (trainers), financial and material constraints, and limited contribution from the government in supplying learning facilities. It is also challenged by the inconclusiveness of trainees' selection criteria, overcrowded rooms, and workshops, and overlooked incentives and promotional activities of the trainers.

Moreover, the level of supervision to support and maintain the quality of the teacher training program is seriously constrained by the lack of professional staff and budget. The financial shortcomings resulted in the narrow resource base and high dependence of the training program on government revenues since the training college has not any additional options to generate internal income. The teacher training program is also facing a problem of inconsistency in the curriculum structure and instructional language application. Similarly, the findings of Kassahun (2013) revealed that curriculum development for the pre-primary school teacher training program is a bit tricky. Admiringly, the participants felt that the pre-primary teacher training program is a key missing element in the development of education at the national level.

Therefore, inadequate financial resources and a lack of capable planners to identify priorities through the diagnosis of issues affecting educational supply, demand, and processes of the pre-primary teacher training are policy challenges facing the program. Another challenging issue in the provision of quality pre-primary teacher training programs is related to the curriculum. As the data revealed, there was a critical variation in the contents of the curriculum and the instructional language between the teacher training program and pre-primary schools.

The findings also pointed out that pre-primary teachers' salary in public and private pre-primary school sectors is not encouraging. In addition, career development and motivational activities are not considered in the promotional structure of pre-primary school sectors. As supported by Biniyam (2014), pre-primary school teachers were rarely provided with the opportunity to develop their profession. Though the government has promised in its policy document to promote incentives to motivate teachers at all levels of education (TGE, 1994), the incentives of the pre-primary school teachers' is highly subjected to negligence. The status of the pre-primary teachers' salary is unpredictably lesser in amount. This, in turn, can result in a lack of interest, and dissatisfaction among the prospective trainees which ultimately exacerbated the turnover of personnel in the system.

As far as the intervention strategies are concerned, the analysis indicates that the government has attempted various policy initiatives, education sector development programs, and national policy frameworks. The sector development programs and policy frameworks paved the way for the intentions of the government to prioritize the pre-primary education sector. Regardless of these policy initiatives, national policy framework commitments, the concern of career development, and continuous professional development strategies for the pre-primary school teachers are missing.

In general, the pre-primary teacher training program is found to be given a limited attention with limited facilities. Shortage of trainers and the financial capacity of the trainees are also challenges that the program faced. The government provided insignificant contribution in solving these problems, and it only limits its attention on the policy issues and supervisory activities without supplying necessary resources, and financial and human requirement aspects to enhance and develop the training program.

## Conclusion and Policy Implications

The criteria employed in the selection of the trainees have to be diversified instead of using only a single variable i.e., a GPA-based approach. The experience of trainees, their interest, oral interviews and written exams to test their handwriting and pictorial practices are basic components to be considered during the selection process. Teacher training colleges need to consider alternative options to enhance internal revenue generation schemes like opening the model pre-schools for the dual purpose of financing the sector and solving practical concerns of the trainees. It is also possible to engage in pre-primary education consultancy services basically because of its amplified experiences in the area. Additionally, it is better to introduce cost-sharing schemes in the sector so as to solve the financial problem of the trainees.

An integrated policy is required in teacher training programs in line with the curriculum of early childcare and education in order to assure holistic child development through the provision of early childhood education-oriented training for pre-primary school teachers. In that regard, it is better to involve private organizations in teacher training programs by shifting the inclination of the government's role towards standardization and continuous inspection tasks. So essentially, the government is expected to design a policy and well-organized mechanisms to monitor and control the successful implementation of the program in private organizations.

The future of pre-primary school teachers' training programs looks left in a gloomy position wherein policymakers are less considerate about the professionalization and career development of pre-primary school teachers. Thus, the policy issues regarding the promotion of the trainers and trainees, career structure, salary and incentive issues, and professionalization aspects require great attention from the concerned stakeholders. Whereas, the career development and promotion policy need to be revised in parallel with the demand of the education system. Additionally, it is motivational to pre-primary school teachers if the career promotional structure is considered to be hierarchical from preschool teacher to pre-primary school supervisor and pre-primary school training coordinator or pre-primary school manager.

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