Developmentally Appropriateness of Curriculum and Integrated Play-BasedPedagogical Practices in Early Childhood Care and Education in Hawassa University Technology Woredas

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Abstract: This paper discusses developmentally appropriateness ofcurricula (DAC), integratedplay-based (child-centered) pedagogical practices, teachers' competencies and learning environment in ECCE in pre-schools of Hawassa University technology woredas. Mixed research method with concurrent triangulation or convergent parallel (QUAN+QUAL) design was applied throughout this study. Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS version 20 and qualitative data were presented in themes side-by-side followed by brief discussion at the same time. The findings of the study shows that the practices of creating child-friendly learning environments (as the third teacher) to carry out indoor and out-door activities are not heartening in most pre-schools. Besides, the practices of integratedplay-based pedagogy in the contexts of preschools are evaluated against the principles of early child learning through steps-by-steps scaffolding and documentation of children's day-to-day activities are not uniformly and properly implemented. The pre-schools had better be suggested to use the 12 principles of early child learning (for 0-8 years old children) to evaluate the steps-by-steps scaffolding playful learning of children until they reach to their zone of proximal development.

Keywords: *ECCE, Developmentally appropriate curricula and integrated play-based pedagogy*

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

This study is aimed at evaluating developmentally appropriateness of curricula (DAC), integrated play-based pedagogical practices and teachers' competencies (as facilitators, co-players, co-producers and scaffolders) in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in pre-schools of technology woredas. Even though preschool education has different development stages at different times in the globe, Mayet al. (2006) stated that preschool education has expanded by the European colonization to the rest of the world by their religious missionaries. But a practical orientation to early education came from the British industrialist and socialist, Robert Owen, who set up an infant school for the children of his cotton mill workers from the age of one and the German educator, Friedrich Fröebel, who put his ideas into practice in a school; he called a "kindergarten" (Lawrence, 1970). More recently, the World declaration on Education for All (EFA) at Jomtien (1990) introduced the idea that "learning begins at birth", affirming ECCE as an integral part of basic education and an educational level in its own right. The Dakar EFA declaration further institutionalized and propagated this objective, and the 2010 Moscow declaration sought to elevate the priority attached to ECCE even more. Overall, the twentieth century witnessed a significant expansion of early childhood provision; much of this initiated and sustained by private agencies and charitable groups but increasingly viewed as a key public responsibility (ILO, 2012).This indicates that different stakeholders participated in the expansion of ECCE world-wide.

Pedagogical approaches are only guided by the countries in order that practitioners adapt the curriculum and pedagogical practices to accommodate the needs of different children although variety and flexibility in the implementation of pedagogical practices and commonalities can be found (Ineke&Miho, 2015). For instance, curricular guidance often advocates structured play-based learning (France, being the exception with a less strong focus on play) and a mixed method approach of child-centered and staff-initiating practices (Denmark and Germany being the exceptions with a strong emphasis on child-initiated practices). Besides, the practice of guidance for the England's child-centered approach with a mix of pedagogical practices is reflected

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in the pedagogy guidance document. Sustained shared thinking and scaffolding practices where the practitioners help the child masters a task or concept that the child is initially unable to grasp independently and offers assistance with only those skills that are beyond the child's capability as effective in stimulating early child development. Hence, in line to this, Ineke&Miho (2015) suggested that age or developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) is regarded as important in pedagogy with an emphasis on integrated play-based learning (Wood, 2007;2013).Likewise, student-centeredness approaches of teaching is the heart of quality education and unquestionable methods of teaching in the 21st century (Girma&Feyera, 2018).This axiom enable researchers to underline that play-based learning ofchildren at ages and stages promote developmentally appropriate practices of varied curricula.Also, Christine (2016) remarked that the practices of integrated play-based pedagogy share four themes which include responsive teaching, documentation and literacy/numeracy rich environment, resources and materials and classroom environment set-up.

In Ethiopia, the pre-school education was established in in 1916(1908E.C) in Dire-Dawa to provide necessary caring services for the children of the French consultants who were assisting in the building of first railroad in Ethiopia (Demeke, 2007). Since then, there were poor efforts exerted to facilitate the opportunity for providing the program for the pre-school age group and improve the whole practices. However, participating in ECCE is the right of the child and it has been considered as bedrock of EFA and the first step in meeting all the other EFA goals. This in turn contributes to the overarching millennium development goal of reducing poverty. Affordable and reliable early childhood education provides essential support for working parents, particularly mothers. In Ethiopia, the government, religious and private sectors tried to enhance, the expansion of ECCE to the rural children through primary school-attached readiness centers such as child-to-child initiatives and 0-grade. Besides, urban and semi-urban children are provided with ECCE through church schools and modern kindergartens to develop children's basic literacy skills, critical thinking, communication, social and practical skills in the journeys of readiness for primary schools.

However, still now due to geographical sizes and lack of special care, the national statistics shows that there are wide discrepancies between urban and rural Ethiopia in meeting ECCE (EMIS, 2017). Although the establishment of modern type early years education had not been delayed historically by European standards (Belay and Hawaz, 2015), its expansion is very slow in our country, Ethiopia. This trend, however, has been drastically changed and subsequently boosting the enrollment rates from the 2.1% of the Sub-Saharan Africa average (UNESCO, 2010) to 26 % at the moment (EMIS, 2014). Thus, ECCE is mainly provided by the private sectors for nearly 70% of the urban children (Young, 2012). The regional disparity in ECCE access ranges from 40.3% for the most urbanized Addis Ababa city to 0.5% for the least urbanized Afar region (EMIS, 2014). This indicates how prominent the disparity is in the urban rural provision of childhood education. In fact, attendance levels even within the urban areas vary, strongly affected by poverty where only around 20% of the poorest fifth of households access pre-school as compared to about 70% of the more advantaged fifth households (Young, 2012).This remarks that addressing access, equity and assuring quality of ECCE in Ethiopia needs further detailed investigations.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

As best experiences, some studies were carried out world-wide on ECCE with respect to curriculum elements, developmentally appropriate practices guidelines,nurturing early learners, early years learning frameworks and pedagogical approaches such as play-based learning in Germany,UK, USA, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Finland and Singapore (Cutter-Mackenzie *et al.,* 2014). Contextually, as African experiences relevant indigenous knowledge could be imparted by deploying grandparents in story telling sessions (Serpell, *et al.*, 2011) would be a potentially valuable addition to the portfolio of intervention strategies for the promotion of ECCE in rural South Africa and Kenya and communities to strengthen the connections between young children's home and school environments. In Ethiopia, no research has been fully conducted on developmentally appropriateness of curriculum and practices of integrated play-based pedagogy at all. Rather few studies conductedby researchers(Tsegaye,2014; Michael, 2017;Yigzaw and Abdurrahman,2017;Goitom,2015; Temesgen, 2016; Teka&Belay,2017& Daniel,2015) the "what":developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices, quality improvements, expansion, practices and challenges of pre-schools, and identified the gaps of access and equity between urban and rural citizens, shortage of trained manpower, high employee turnover, and lack of teachers training opportunity, low teachers' salary and limited parental care as some of challenges facing pre-primary education in Ethiopia.

However, these local studies did not discourse issues related to appropriateness of the curriculum, implementations and application of theprinciples ofintegrated child-centered (play-based) pedagogy. Likewise, as far source readings, knowledge and experiences concerned, no research has been fully conducted practically on the "how" integrated play-based pedagogical approach is being implemented, the intents and relevance of curriculainECCE in Ethiopia.Henceforth, if the problems of not utilizing developmentally appropriate play-based curriculum through child-centered pedagogy are not solved on time, the failures of quality in ECCE at

ground of educational arena will be aggravated. As a result, it becomes difficult to produce competent future professionals who solve political, economic and socio-cultural problems of Ethiopia in the future. Therefore, we aremotivated toinvestigate developmentally appropriateness of curricula and integrated play-based pedagogical practices andteachers' professional competencies in ECCEin preschools in HawassaUniversity technology woredas.

1.3. Objectives of the Study
The main purpose of study was to evaluate developmentally appropriateness of curricula to the target children and practices of integrated play-based pedagogy in pre-schools of Hawassa university technology woredas. More specifically, the study addresses the following objectives. These are to:
1. Examine the efforts of teachers implementing DAC through integrated play-based pedagogical practices e.g. co-playing, mentoring, coaching and documenting everyday life activities of children.
2. Evaluate the integration between adult initiated structured-play and child initiated-free play-based pedagogy in the design and implementation of ECCE curriculum.
3. Explore the degree of communication, partnerships and collaboration among the stakeholders in creating literacy and numeracy rich child-friendly learning environment.
4. Evaluate the practices of pre-primary schools in contextualizing the standards set by their regional states to prevent one-size fits for all in ECCE.
5. To examine integrated play-based pedagogical practices against the 12 basic principles of learning in early Childhood (0-8 years of age).

1.4. Research Questions
The following research questions were raised to be answered throughout the course of the study. These are:
1. To what extent are the curricula of ECCE developmentally appropriate to the target children in order to practice integrated play-based pedagogy?
2. How do teachers as mentors, co-players and co-producers implement the curricula through integrated play-based pedagogical practices in ECCE in pre-schools?
3. How do the practices of creating child-friendly learning environment (as the third teacher) set the stages for integrated play-based learning to carry out indoor and outdoor activities?
4.To what extent are the pre-primary schools contextualized the standards set by their regional states to prevent a generic one-size fits for all in ECCE?
5. How well is an integrated play-based pedagogy practiced against the 12 basic principles of learning in early childhood (0-8 years of age) in our context?

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY
2.1. Description of the Study Area
Sidama Zone is one the Zones found in southern nation and nationalities peoples regional state (SNNPRS) which is comprised of six Hawassa University's technology and research inspiration Woredas. These are Hawassa City, Boricha, Shebadino, Dore Bafena, Dale, Wondogenet and Hula. Two woredas and Hawassa city administration were selected by using simple random sampling technique. Therefore, the public and private pre-schools/kindergartens for this particular study were selected from Dale and Wondogenetworedas, and Hawassa city administration by using systematic sampling technique by believing that the sample frame units are available in the form of list of schools in each sample woreda. These woredas were chosen because they are HawassaUniversity's center of research inspiration.

2.2. Methods and Materials
In the attempts of examining the appropriatenessof curricula, integrated play-based pedagogical practicesand teachers' competencies in ECCE in preschools of Hawassa university technology transfer woredas, amixed method approach with concurrent triangulation or convergent parallel mixed design was selected throughout the study (Creswell, 2009 &2014).Philosophically, mixed method is thepragmatic movementthat moves past the paradigm wars by offering a logical and practical alternative. Its logic of inquiry includes the use of induction (discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one's results).Besides, it is an attempt to legitimate the use of multiple approaches in answering research questions rather than restricting or constraining researchers' choices i.e., it rejects dogmatism. This indicates that mixed method is inclusive, pluralistic and complementary which suggests that researchers take an eclectic approach to method selection thinking about and how to conduct research.

Concurrent approaches are less time consuming because both qualitative and quantitative data are collected at the same time in the same visit to the field (Creswell, 2009) because the researcher will collect both

quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously and then compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, differences and combination. Some authors refer to this comparison as confirmation, disconfirmation, cross-validation and corroboration. This model generally uses separate quantitative and qualitative methods as means to offset the weaknesses inherent within one method, with the strengths of the other or conversely, the strength of one adds to the strength of the other (Creswell, 2009). In this approach, the quantitative and qualitative data collection is concurrent and can happen in one phase of the research study.

Ideally, the weight is equal between the two methods. The mixing during this approach usually found in an interpretation or discussion section is to actually merge the data i.e. transform one type of data to the other type of data so that they can easily be compared or integrated the results of two databases side-by-side in a discussion (Creswell, 2003 & 2009). This side-by-side integration is often seen in mixed methods studies in which a discussion section first provides quantitative statistical results followed by qualitative quotes that support or disconfirm the quantitative results.

2.3. Sources of Data

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of datato get sufficient evidences as far as the problem is concerned. Hence, the primary sources of the data were ECCE teachers/professionals, educational experts(i.e. principals, supervisors, regional ECCE coordinators), parent-teacher association (PTA) members and parents/guardians. Besides, the secondary sources of data were intentional and transitional plan, curricula, records of day-to-day childhood life activities/diary of teachers', students' exercise book, early childhood guidelines, learning environment and set up(instructional resources, attractiveness and neatness).

2.4.Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size of each target population will be determined by believing that the ideal sample size is large enough to be selected economically in terms of both time and complexity and small enough to be manageable and specific for analysis (Best and Kahn, 1989). Besides,judgements have to be made about four key factors in sampling. These are the sample size, representativeness and parameters of the sample, access to the sample and the sampling strategy to be used (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). The sample size of quantitative part of study will be determined by Yamane's Formula, $n=N/1+N (e^2)$. Where: e = the level of precision with +/- 5%, n=sample, N=Total population, at 95% confidence level and p =0.05 for categorical level for an alpha level (Yamane, 1967 cited in Cochran, 1977).

A multi-stage concurrent sampling process in which quantitative-probability and qualitative non-probability purposeful sampling are combined as independent sampling procedures or jointly (Creswell, 2009 & 2014) were used in this particular study. Hence, woredas and Hawassa city administrationwere selected as samples by using a qualitative purposive sampling technique because of the technology woredas of Hawassa University and on the bases of their establishment, organizational levels and standards of pre-schools and kindergartens to implement play-based pedagogy in their ECCE in comparison to new, non-organized and young pre-schools.

Then, pre-schools/kindergartenswere selected by using systematic sampling technique by believing that this procedure is useful when sampling frame is available in the form of list of schools in respective woredas. In such a design the selection process starts by picking some random point in the list and then every n[th] element is selected until the desired numbers of schools are secured. Cohen *et al*. (2007) suggested that one can decide how frequently to make systematic sampling by a simple statistics: the total number of the wider population being represented divided by the sample size required: f =N/Sn, where: f = frequency interval, N = the total number of the wider population, Sn = the required number in the sample. From the schools selected as samples of the study, teachers wereselected by using simple random sampling techniques to provide equal chances to each teacher to be selected as sample of the study.

Besides, principals, supervisors, ECCE coordinators of regions/city administrators of ECCEwere selected by using availability sampling techniques by believing that they are manageable in size and provide sufficient information on the study. Finally, parents from PTA-members and caregivers were selected by using purposive sampling technique on the bases of their relevance to their children feeding, health, hygiene, learning and well-being.

Table1: Population and Samples of the Study

S/N	Categories	Population			Sample Respondents			Sampling Technique
		Gov't	Private	Total	Gov't	Private	Total	
1	Woredas&Hawassa City	7	-	7	3	-	3	Simple random sampling
2	Schools	22	36	58	15	22	37	Systematic sampling
				More specifically				
3	Supervisors	8	-	8	8	-	8	Availability sampling
4	Principals	28	36	74	28	36	64	Availability sampling
5	ECCE coordinator	1	-	1	1	-	1	Availability sampling
6	Teachers	205	619	824	55	105	160	Simple random sampling
7	PTA members	140	250	390	4	4	8	Purposive sampling
	Total from no. 3-7	**382**	**905**	**1287**	**96**	**145**	**241**	

As shown above in table 1, a total of approximately241respondents were selected as samples of the study by using different non-probability and probability sampling techniques from a total of approximately1287 target population of the selected pre-schools of 2018/2019 academic year. Hence, 8 supervisors' and64 principals and oneECCE coordinators were selected by using availability technique based on the logic that they are manageable in size and give adequate information. Besides, 160teachers were selected by using simple random sampling technique to provide an equal and independent chance for each teacher. Likewise, 8 parents from PTA were selected by using purposive sampling techniques on the bases of the care and services they provide to their children.

III. PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA
3.1. Developmental appropriateness of ECCE curricula to target Children

Table 2: One-Sample t-Test on developmentally appropriateness of the curricula to target children

Variables	N	M	SD	SEM	Test value	T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean D.
Play-based developmentally appropriate curricula	232	81.56	11.59	.89	77	7.69	149	.000	-4.56

The mean score of the thematically integrated informal curricula for target-children rated by teachers, principals and supervisors ($M = 81.56$, $SD = 11.59$) is significantly different from the test value (77), $t(149) = -4.56$, $p < .05$, indicating that the appropriateness of the curricula is rated negatively.

Table 3: One- Way ANOVA to check the perceptions of stakeholders about DAP

Groups	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1711.24	3	570.54	6.62	.002
Within Groups	19986.65	232	86.15		
Total	21697.89	235			

As observed in Table 3, the result of the analysis of variance performed on the developmentally appropriate pedagogical practices in ECCE reveals that there is a significant difference among partners of schools (teachers, principals, supervisors and PTA) on their perception of the developmentally appropriate curriculum to target children, F (3,232) = 6.62, $p <$ .05.This shows that different partners have different perceptions/awareness of play-based integrated curricula.Besides, one of the interview; summarized that

"….the curricula of ECCE lack uniformity from school to school. For instance, in my school, there is shortage of instructional materials to implement play-based pedagogy. Besides, teachers have no awareness about the relationships between play and classroom instruction" (IF_1).

Therefore, one can conclude that there is a challenge with regard integrating the curriculum to the ages and stages of the target children.

Table 4: One-Sample test on integration of adult-guided and children free-play curricula

Variable	Groups	N	M	SD	SEM	T-value	T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean D.
Integration of adult- guided &children-free-play curricula	Teachers	160	72.56	11.43	7.28	93	7.26	159	.000	20.44
	Principals	64	48.74	6.27	1.15	49	.648	63	.522	.26
	Supervisors	8	29.61	7.21	2.29	30	.416	7	.798	.39

As observed in Table 4, the mean evaluation score of teachers (M = 72.56, SD = 7.28) is significantly different from the test value (93), t (159) = 7.26, $p <$ .05, indicating that teachers have negatively perceived the practices of integration of adult-guided structured and children-free curricula in their preschools.

In contrast, the mean score of principals (M =487.74, SD = 6.27) and supervisors (M = 29.70, SD = 7.21) are not significantly different from the test value (50), t (63) = .26, p> .05, t (7) = .39, $p >$ .05, respectively. The results are not statistically significant indicating that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the mean assessment of the integration of guided and child-free curricula of ECCE is different from the criterion value at .05 significance level. Moreover, one of the interviewee suggested that

"We usually provide structured instruction to children in our pre-schools to make them save from risks. If you make child free they may quarrel each other, fail and face many challenges like physical damage on their body parts etc."(IF_2).

From the above evidences, one can conclude that the awareness of stakeholders on the advantages of integrated adult-guided and child-free curriculum in their respective schools is not encouraging to the whole development of children.These results in the challenges of creating varied learning opportunities for children (e.g. whole group, small group, individual and independent learning)

Table 5: One-Way ANOVA on the application of play-based pedagogy against the principles of child learning

Groups	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1945.66	3	648.55	7.92	.003
Within Groups	18989.45	232	81.85		
Total	21835.11.	235			

On the basis of many data in the analyses, Table 5 shows the result of the analysis of variances against the principles of early child learning. Some of the principles were properly handled and yet some are not properly utilized to ensure child-centered learning through scaffolding step by step in order to ensure children playful learning until they reach to the zone of proximal development. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the respondents' perceptions throughout the study. This is assured at (F (3,232) = 7.92, p<.05). This discourses that the standards of ECCE in the regional state are not uniformly practiced in pre-schools under investigation.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Teaching and learning are scholarly activities and professions which draw high level performances and expertise in the discipline and relevant professional experiences together with highly developed collaboration, communication and interpersonal skills. However, from major findings of the study, one may conclude that even though there were many attempts to make the curricula developmentally appropriate to the ages and stages of children, standardize to the contexts of the regions to prevent the generic one size fits for all generic syllogism, the practices of children-centered learningin our pre-schools are contradicting with thebasic

principles of early child-learning. Besides, the personal, social, professional and pedagogical competencies of teachers/caregivers, principals, ECCE coordinators, supervisors, PTA members and the parents are not pledged to develop communication, collaboration and partnerships among themselves in order to create learning opportunities through transitional and intentional planning to the discoveries in the classrooms (indoor and outdoor activities). Moreover, the stakeholders of each pre-school are not competent enough in creating varied learning opportunities for children (e.g. whole group, small group, individual and independent learning).Similarly, there were difficulties in making critical observation, prevention and early educational intervention in creating child-free learning environment and integrating it with adult-guided instructional system for child's zone of proximal development through steps-by-steps scaffolding and documentation of children's day-to-day life activities.

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