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An Assessment of Early Childhood Care and Education in Tigray Regional State: The Case of Kilteawlaelo Wereda.

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Abstract

The study basically aimed at assessing the current situation of early childhood care and education in Tigray regional state: the case of kilteawlaelo wereda, Ethiopia. This issue is important because it helps to understand the effectiveness of early childhood care and education on child's development and to explore the challenges and important lessons for scaling up the practices of early childhood program in the region. Therefore, this study first examined the definition of early childhood care and education which has been implementing in the region. Second it examined and discussed the types of preschool children and the services provided for them. Third, it assessed the major stakeholders who are taking part in the preschool education process. Those stakeholders were investigated by the study, may contribute their lions' share in enhancing the effective implementation of preschool education. Finally it has identified the major challenge of preschool education in Tigray regional state: the case of kilteawlaelo wereda. As a means, qualitative research method was employed to analyze the collected qualitative data. Descriptive study method was used to depict the situation of early childhood care and education in kilteawlaelo wereda. It involved, two national and one regional UNICEF officials; one regional early childhood education focal person and one regional education plan expert; one education focal person and one woreda education head from the woreda were selected as major participants. Besides, five parents including parent teacher association head, two preschool principals; two preschool teachers and three caregivers of the O-class and child-to-child were interviewed. Both types of children (the child-to-child and the O-class) were observed and recorded during their class activities. Data were collected through group and individual interviews; observation and document analysis. Thematic data analysis techniques were used to analyze the gathered qualitative data. The study found out that most rural woredas of Tigray have introduced the child-to-child and O-class programs in the attempt to reduce education wastage and to strengthen the basic education process. Moreover, the preschool education programs were found to be helpful to many children to progress in their academic and social activities; it raised children's confidence and positive attitude towards learning; increased parental and community awareness to the program; and increased a sense of volunteerism to teaching.

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However, the preschool education lacks its own standardized text books and other relevant reference materials. Most of them use the formal school text such as grade one text books and the like. It also observed that the teachers have unclear lesson plans who tried to react sporadically to teach certain words and numbers. The physical setting itself reveled to be not welcoming and unattractive for the children and teachers too. On top of that, other integrated services such as health facilities, water taps and other sanitarian requirements were limited. Finally, pertinent recommendations were drawn from the findings and the conclusions of the study.

Keywords: Child-to-Child, O-class, Early Childhood Care and Education.

Introduction

Early childhood is a time of remarkable transformation and extreme vulnerability. These years of a child's life represent a crucial period of growth and change. Programmes that support young children during the years before they go to primary school provide strong foundations for subsequent learning and development. Such programmes also compensate for disadvantage, disability and exclusion, offering a way out of poverty. In relation with this, World Declaration on Education for All stressed that Learning begins at birth. Systematic development of basic learning tools and concepts therefore requires that due attention be paid to the care of young children and their initial education, which can be delivered via arrangements that involve parents, the community or institutions, depending on requirements.

In recent years, research has underscored the need to prioritise early childhood care and education (ECCE) services. It was believed that poverty and other disadvantages (disability) experienced during early childhood can greatly affect a child's development, while well-planned interventions can have long-lasting benefits (Martin Woodhead, 2009**)**

Programmes thus increasingly focus on early childhood care and education as an important proper strategy, underlining the principle that all children have a right to development and to education in their best interests, without discrimination. There is growing global recognition of the potential of early education to improve and change young lives. The key question is how far this potential is being translated into reality, through positive early childhood policies in practice.

The Jomtien Declaration recognized that basic education begins well before primary school. This was a watershed in the understanding of early childhood as it brought Early Child Care Education (ECCE) into mainstream education. Following Jomtien, the value of ECCE was emphasized in the first goal of the Dakar Framework for Action. The goal calls for expanding and improving comprehensive ECCE, especially for disadvantaged and vulnerable children. The special theme for the

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2007 Education for All Global Monitoring Report was also Early Childhood Care and Education. This has not only emphasized the importance of ECCE, but also the need to measure the impact on girls and boys.

Key operational terms:

- **Child to Child programs:**

This child to child pre-education system is an approach to entertain the educational needs of the rural children in their early age (4-5 years of age)**.** This approach is a type of playing and learning arrangements using some local materials, alphabet and pictorial symbols.

- **O-class:**

This educational program includes the educational provision of children whose ages are 6.

- **Early Childhood Care and Education :**

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) refers to a wide range of programs, all aimed at the physical, cognitive and social development of children before they enter primary school; theoretically from birth to about age 7 or 8.

1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to critically analyze the problem, the researcher has tried to investigate the following basic questions:

1. How is early childhood education defined?
2. What are the types of services provided to children whose ages are appropriate to pre-education?
3. What are the types of children who are getting pre-education services?
4. Who are the major stakeholders to take part in the educational process of the pre-school children?
5. What is the impact of the pre-education outputs to the regional development?
6. What are the major challenges that early childhood education could face?

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to describe the conditions of early childhood education, care and its effectiveness on child's development in Tigray regional state.

It also tries to explore the challenges and important lessons for scaling up the practices of early childhood programs in the region.

Finally, it suggests possible measures to device some alternative approaches of early childhood education and care.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The result of this study is believed to contribute for all groups of society (i.e. the children, the parents, the community, the government itself). It is especially helpful for the nation to produce quality and productive people through providing quality education since early childhood period shapes the children's mentality beginning from their early age.

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It also serves the basis for putting important lessons to entertain the children with all types of services.

4. Concepts of Early Childhood Care and Education

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) refers to a wide range of programs, all aimed at the physical, cognitive and social development of children before they enter primary school; theoretically from birth to about age 7 or 8. ECCE supports children's survival, growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth up to primary school in all forms of learning settings (UNESCO, 2004).

The provision of ECCE programs can free members of the household from childcare responsibilities, allowing parents to work or older siblings to attend school. Early Childhood Care Education programs encompass very diverse arrangements, from parenting to community-based child care, center-based provision and pre-primary education, often in schools. Programs typically aim at two age groups: children under 3 and those from age 3 up to primary school entry (UNESCO, 2006).

Education for All further reported that ECCE is a right, recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Early Child Care Education can improve the well-being of young children, especially in the developing world, where a child has a four in ten chance of living in extreme poverty and 10.5 million children a year die from preventable diseases before age 5. Early childhood is a time of remarkable brain development that lays the foundation for later learning.

Theoretically, learning in its essence begins before a child walks through the classroom door. From the earliest age, children's development and learning are fostered through their interactions with caring human beings in secure, nurturing and stimulating environments. Young children's experiences in the first years of life – well before they begin school – create the foundation for subsequent learning. Although early childhood is a period of great potential for human growth and development, it is a time when children are especially fragile and vulnerable.

In general, it contributes the EFA goals and the Millennium Development Goals, especially the overarching goal of reducing poverty, as well as the education and health goals.

However, despite the considerable progresses, the status of young children remains the most challenging issue particularly in the poorest countries. A child born in the developing world has four out of ten chance of living in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than US$1 a day. An estimated 10.5 million children died in 2005 before they reached age 5, most from preventable diseases and in countries that have experienced major armed conflict since 1999. AIDS has orphaned more than 15 million children under age 18; 80% of them in sub-Saharan Africa. The rights of millions of

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children are violated by trafficking, child labor, abuse and neglect. Finally, many of the 50 million children whose births are not registered each year are unable to access basic services or schooling as a result (UNICEF, 2005b).

For all these reasons early intervention is crucial: it is far more challenging and costly to compensate for educational and social disadvantage among older children and adults than it is to provide preventive measures and support in early childhood. Good-quality early childhood care and education programs–including immunization, parenting education, home-based activities and kindergartens, preschools or nurseries – provide health, nutrition, hygiene, stimulation and social interaction that support children's development and learning. Participation of young children in such programs can lead to a more equitable society.

Early childhood years set the foundations for life; ensuring that young children have positive experiences, that their rights are guaranteed and that their needs for health, stimulation and support are met is crucial to their well-being and development.

In a context where family and community structures are evolving and countries are going through rapid social and economic changes, early childhood programs complement the roles of parents and other careers in raising children during the early years. There are many benefits of early childhood programs: easier transition to primary schools, better completion rates, reduced poverty, increased social equality and high economic returns which make the case for expanding and improving ECCE programs in order to meet EFA goal.

Early Childhood: A Sensitive Period

Children's physical and psychological development is shaped by their experiences during the first years of life. This intuitive idea has been amply confirmed by research. Indeed, there is a long history of philosophical and scientific interest in early childhood and its impact on human development in fields as diverse as Biology, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology and Economics, as well as in applied research on Education, Social Policy, Health, Law and Development Studies. A broad consensus has emerged among those who share this *developmental perspective* on early childhood:

First, young children's physical, mental, social and emotional functioning differs from that of older children and adults, and comprises distinctive stages and milestones of development.

Second, numerous progressive transformations occur in children's physical, mental, cognitive and socio-emotional facilities from earliest infancy to the beginning of schooling. These transformations mark the acquisition of skills and capacities, ways of relating, communicating, learning and playing.

Third, early childhood is the period when humans are most dependent on secure, responsive relationships with others (adults, siblings and peers) to assure not just their survival but also their

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emotional security, social integration, and cognitive skills.

Fourth, young children's development is especially sensitive to negative effects resulted from early under-nutrition, deprivation of care and of responsive parenting, and ill treatment.

Fifth, if children's basic needs are not met, or they are maltreated or abused, the repercussions are often felt throughout childhood and passes into adulthood.

Finally, while early development can be summarized in terms of universal general principles, the development pathways vary and are linked to individual capacities, special needs, and gender.

Neurobiologist and other brain research fields have been especially influential in recent decades, as they have highlighted the role of the early years in the formation of the human brain (Center for Early Education and Development, 2002; Mustard, 2002, 2005). Brain cell connectors (synapses) form rapidly in the first few years of life: the density of synapses peaks at age 3 and comes a period of plateau and elimination followed by decreases in density to adult level. Because of this pattern of synapse formation, the first three years of life are the most important for brain development.

Moreover, research has shown that the overall environment within which the child is raised has an impact on brain development: early exposure to toxic substances such as nicotine, alcohol and drugs can have devastating effects on the developing brain and the negative experience or the absence of an appropriate stimulation is more likely to have serious and sustained effects on a young child than on the elder once.

For very specific aspects of brain development, certain 'critical periods' exist before age three during which adequate stimulation must be received or development is impaired in some cases permanently. For instance, the absence of a reasonable amount of light in the first weeks after birth alters the development of the visual system (e.g. development of binocularity is not possible). Similarly, a child who never hears language, or receives extremely poor care (as in some orphanages), will likely suffer developmental deficits. Such effects have led some to envisage the first years of life as an extended critical period, a window of opportunity for development, closed by age 3.

Still, researchers have much to learn about the persistence of such effects and the ability of the brain to overcome them. Furthermore, the brain continues to grow and mature well into adolescence (Bailey, 2002; Horton, 2001). Sensitive periods are at times in development when the absence of some kind of stimulus results in the process. These periods are generally longer than critical periods and characterized by more flexibility in the timing of input or experience to the brain and in the brain's ability to learn and develop over time. Thus, as the notion of a critical period implies, it may never be

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too late to acquire a skill but needs to get it early preferable.

5. Rationales of Early Childhood Care and Education

The rationale made for Early Childhood Care Education rests on several ways of argument: These are the economic arguments, the developmental arguments, and the children's rights arguments. Each of these arguments implies a different way of seeing, understanding and supporting young children. In practice they are melded together to make a composite and sometimes contradictory case for more and better Early Childhood Care Education provision (Calman L., 2008).

5.1 The Human Capital Argument

The human capital arguments claim that Early Childhood Care Education is cost effective when seen in terms of its economics analysis point of view.

It is argued that early interventions are more economically effective than any subsequent educational interventions. Calman L. (2008) argued that investing in early education generates economic development for communities in the form of jobs, the purchase of goods and services. In the long run, quality early education builds an employable and educated workforce. Children who receive early education arrive at school; ready to learn; and do better in schools. They are more likely to graduate from high school and to hold jobs. They are less likely to be on welfare; and are significantly more likely to be protected themselves against winding up around the courts and the jails—and costing taxpayers a fortune (Calman L., 2008)

Similarly, Harvey G. et.al., (2005) strongly believed that the returns are greater if we invested the same amount of money in the stock market. ''Young children's lives can be reshaped by appropriate early intervention – you get better economic results by investing in young children because they become more productive citizens in adulthood'' (Penn H., 2008).

Provision of some investment to an early intervention programs leads to improved school performance, since it lessens grade repetition in grade 1 which strongly associated with school drop-out (UNESCO, 2006).

5.2 The Developmental of Brain Research Argument

The second strand of argument for Early Childhood Education and Care is developmental. It draws heavily on brain research. According to this argument, stimulation of brain cells in infancy through attentive parenting led to the development of more neuronal connections, which led to faster and better brain functioning (Penn H., 2008). Research on brain development shows that the

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brain develops more rapidly in the first three years of life. For instance, Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) (cited in UNICEF, 2009) found that it is imperative to provide supportive services for pregnant women and young children from birth to age three. During this period, approximately 80% of the brain is developed. In other words, children who do not have a stimulating environment have smaller than normal brains for their age (UNESCO, 2007).

It is commonly agreed that young children are especially vulnerable to environmental influences especially in neglectful parenting, hunger; toxic or dangerous environments, endemic diseases, polluted water, war and other hazards harmful to the children. Early Childhood Education and Care programmes may offset these hazards. Nutritional supplements, protective health programmes and caring safe environments can offer counter-protection in places where young children lead difficult lives (Penn H., 2008)

5.3 The Children's Rights argument

The third argument that recently put and strongly stressed agenda of the EFA Global Monitoring Report is the children's rights agenda). A recent update of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has elaborated how the concept of rights might apply to preschool age children (CRC. 2005; Woodhead M., 2006).

Penn also argued that young children have *entitlements* to basic services, to protection, to provision and to active participation in the lives that they lead. In other ways, if every child has basic entitlements, *all children* accesses to basic facilities such as education, health, shelter, clean water and sanitation. A child rights' approach puts emphasis on the lives of children as competent citizens, and sees the provision of ECEC services in that wider context (Penn H., 2008).

Further more UNESCO (1992) stated that children need special care, protection and due emphasis on the primary caring and protective responsibility of the family. It also reaffirms the need for legal and other protection of the child before and after birth.

6. Benefits of Early Childhood Care and Education

Early childhood care and education benefits to good child development outcomes that set the foundation for lifelong learning and help in the monitoring of health and nutrition status during this critical period of development (UNESCO, 2004). Especially, those with ssocially disadvantaged children who attend preschool are more ready for primary school, perform better in school and are less likely to drop out than their peers who do not attend preschool. Early childhood programmes that give children meals increase the chance that children who live in poverty (UNESCO, 2007).

Young Lives (2010) found that high-quality early childhood care and education is a core strategy for poverty reduction. There is evidence of high returns from ECCE investments, which can contribute to

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global policy priorities such as tackling child malnutrition, increasing children's successful participation in school, and strengthening economic development.

Young Lives also highlighted the importance of pre-school services for children aged 4 to 5 ensures the most disadvantaged children with quality services and adequate governance if ECCE policies are to live up to their potential as a strategy for poverty reduction. Thus, supporting children and families early in life can help to interrupt the cycle of poverty (Young Lives, 2010).

In short, it is believed to have a huge substantial payoff and enormous positive impacts on the quality of life of children when there is an improved public investment on early childhood development programs (Harvey G. et.al, 2005).

6.1 Early Childhood Care and Education improves primary school attendance and performance

Early childhood care and education assist children to be well prepared for elementary school. As reported by Harvey G. et.al., (2005), children who have got quality early childhood care and education perform higher scores on math and reading tests, greater language abilities. It also has less grade retention, less need for special education and remedial work in elementary schools as well as Lower rates of child abuse and neglect.

The positive impact of ECCE programme participation on education at the primary level and beyond enhances physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, language development and basic cognitive skills.; reduce delayed enrolment, dropout and grade repetition; and increase completion and achievement (UNESCO, 2006).

UNESCO (2007) revealed that attending preschool helps girls and boys do better in primary school and has better cognitive skills that children are more aware of what is going on and better able to figure out what to do. For instance, pre-school experience in the United Kingdom resulted in improved measures of intellectual development, independence, concentration and sociability during the first three years of primary schooling (Sylva et al., 2004 cited in UNESCO, 2006). Another study surveyed in a disadvantaged district of Nepal indicated more than 95% of children attending an ECCE programme went on to primary school, compared to 75% of non-participants; the grade 1 repetition rate of participants was one-seventh that of non participants and the participants are more likely to adopt friendly teaching methods and curricula (Arnold et al., 2000, cited in UNESCO, 2006).

7. Worldwide progress in early childhood care and education

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According to the 'Global Monitoring Report', the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean lead the developing world in the provision of pre-school education. Some 62 per cent of that region's pre-school-age children are in education programmes – compared to 35 per cent in the developing countries of East Asia and the Pacific; 32 per cent in South and West Asia; 16 per cent in the Arab states; and 12 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2006).

Whilst coverage rates are increasing worldwide, .children from poorer and rural households have less access to ECCE programmes than those from richer and urban ones (EFA, 2007). In addition, many countries have no programmes addressing the diverse needs (health, nutrition, care and education) of children in the first three years of life. Few countries have established national frameworks to coordinate ECCE programmes. Although ECCE enrolments fell sharply in transition countries after the break-up of the Soviet Union, research showed there are some recovering in the program. For instance, the coverage is greatest among developing countries including in Latin America and the Caribbean with the exception of the sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States (EFA, 2007).

Among others, child to child education was one of the contributing approachs to initiate early intervention. The lack of financial resources and infrastructure for early care and education in many developing countries creates a challenge to find new ways to improve early childhood education. A child-to-child approach to enhance learning in developing countries is designed to provide preschool-aged children with early learning opportunities in their homes and their communities at very low cost http://www.unicef.org/media/media38456.htm/.

Child-to-child model has already been used quite successfully to improve community health in developing countries. Early childhood education is also proven to enhance child development and improve key child outcomes, such as school readiness and related early learning competencies, in a more comprehensive manner.

It was conducted in six countries: Bangladesh, China, Ethiopia, Tajikistan, Yemen, and Democratic Republic of Congo from 2008 to 2010 April. Young facilitators from age 12 to 18 and their grade level is between 5- 6 are voluntarily involved. Parents and school teachers are supervised the process. Children who are participated in the program are found between 5 to 6 years old who will soon begin primary school (http://www.unicef.org/media/media38456.htm/).

Impressively enough, a large number of countries have introduced different intervention practices of early childhood care and education programs. For instance, more than 70 countries have practiced such early childhood intervention programs. The United Kingdom, Mexico, China, India, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, Zambia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Ethiopia

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are some of the countries that have practiced the child to child as well as the O-class pre-education programs:

8. Early Childhood Care and Education Development in Ethiopia

In Ethiopian, out of the total 73 million populations more than 33 million (over 45%) are children below fifteen (Population Census, 2007). However, their access to education, health, nutrition and other resources are limited. For example, in 2005, Infant mortality rate stood at 77 and under-five mortality rate was 123 per thousand live births (DHS, 2005). That means 1 in every 13 children die before reaching the age of one, while 1 in 8 does not survive up to its fifth birthday (DHS, 2005).

Like wise, with nearly one in two (47%) children under five years of age categorized as being chronically malnourished; about 83% children with iodine deficiency, and 39% children estimated to have goitre. The majority of births in Ethiopia (94%) are delivered at home. Over 7 out of 10 mothers do not receive antenatal care. In 2003, there were an estimated 5.4 million (13%) orphan children.

Woodhead, M. (2009) found that there are significant inequalities in access to early education in Ethiopia, India and Peru, as well as clear discrepancies in the quality of services available. These findings underline the importance of ensuring that high-quality care and education in early childhood reach the poorest children if educational policies are to fulfil their potential. Similarly, UNESCO (2007) reported that in Ethiopia pre-school is a minority experience although Ethiopia has made rapid progress towards achieving universal enrolment and gender parity at the primary school level (Young Lives,2005). To help fill the gap at the level, the government is encouraging the involvement of other partners, including the private sector. Private preschools are the main option for all children in Ethiopia, but access to such schools strongly favours children from more advantaged families around the urban. Most preschools are run by NGOs, communities, private enterprises, faith organizations etc. Although the number of pre-primary schools is increasing every year; their distribution is limited to the major urban centres. In 2005/06 out of the estimated 6,959,935 children of the appropriate age group (4-6) only about 186,728 children have been reported to have access to pre-primary education in 1,794 kindergartens all over the country.

The level of enrolment in Ethiopia is therefore, negligible when compared to the appropriate age group. For instance, In 2007/2008, the early childhood education enrolment rate was 3.9% (MOE, 2008/2009). On top of this, the statistics at national level showed that 22.9% of pupils enrolled in grade 1 had left school before reaching grade 2. For the same year, the survival rate to grade 8 was 43.6%. Similarly, the latest Kindergarten statistical data of the Ethiopian ministry of education of 2010

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showed that its enrolment rate has slightly risen to 4.8%. With the exception of the three regions such as Addis Ababa(85%), Diredawa(23%), and Hareri(15.3%) almost all regions look to have similar enrolment scores. Such statistical differences were observed in the tables below:

Table 1. Gross enrollment rate of kindergarten at 2009/10 in Ethiopia

Region	Tigray	Adiss Adis	Direda wa	Hareri	Amhara	Oromia	Afar	Somali	SNNP	Benisha ngul	Gambel	Nation
In %	3.8	85	23	15.3	2.4	3.6	1.0	1.6	3.6	3.1	4.5	4.8

Source: FDRE, Ministry of Education(2010). Statistics Annual Abstarct: Adiss Ababa .

As shown in table2 and 3 below, low enrolment rate of pre-education is supposed to be one of the major contributing factors of educational wastage. For instance, in Ethiopia, the quality indicators of primary schools such as repetition rate, dropout rate and completion rates of grade 5 and 8 were resulted to be 4.9%, 18.6%, 75.6% and 47.8% respectively. This shows that the internal efficiency of our educational system was highly affected by the dropping outs of the children inputs that inturn affects the target set by EFA and MDG goals. Although there are many improvements in progress, some indicators are shown to be declined(example, dropout rate was increased from 22.4% in 2004/5 to 22.9% in 2009/10; repetition rate of grade 4-8 raised from 5.3% to 6.7% in the same years.

Table 2. Educational efficiency outputs of primary education in Ethiopia (2008/9)

	Boys	Girls	Total
Repetition rate	4.7	5.2	4.9
Dropout rate	18.2	19.0	18.6
Completion rate			
Grade 5	77.5	73.7	75.6
Grade 8	51.0	44.5	47.8

Table 3. ESDP III target set for 2009/10

	Base year 2004/5	Target 2009/10	Achievement 2009/10
Grade1 dropout rate	22.4	9.5	22.9

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Primary school dropout rate for girls	13.6	5.26	13.2
Average grade 4-8 repetition rate	5.3	2.93	6.7
Completion rate			
Grade 5	57.4	121.14	75.6
Grade 8	34.3	58.17	47.8

Source: FDRE, Ministry of Education (2010). Education Statistics Annual Abstract: Addis Ababa .

Thus, three year school readiness pilot project was initiated by UNICEF and the Child-to-Child Trust in 2007 came to an end in May 2010. Currently, the government of Ethiopia is trying to implement ECCE policy and programs in all regions (MOE., MOH., MOWA,2009).

For instance, in March 31, 2010 three ministries such as the ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of women's Affairs made a historic joint millstone to launch the early childhood care and education policy and strategic frame work. The policy calls for a collective effort by all sectors in achieving the overall goal of promoting early stimulation, health care and early education for all children from prenatal to seven years. The policy focuses on enhancing the quality, accessibility and equitable distribution of services for children through more efficient partnerships and capacity building programmes. The policy stresses four basic services including parental education, health and early stimulation programme from prenatal up to three years, pre-school community-based kindergarten from four up to six years and community based non-formal school readiness programmes.

Therefore, various stakeholders including the parents and care givers, the community, the MOE, MOH, MOWA, and other social and nongovernmental organizations should work hand in hand to fully and successfully implement this novice program in Ethiopia.

9. THE STATUS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN TIGRAY

Early childhood education in Tigray was mainly practiced by nongovernmental organizations, communities, and faith-organizations. Almost all of these institutions were centered at the urban areas. Even these urban preschool centers were lacking adequate infrastructures. Mostly, their compounds were designed for residence purposes. ''Many of them didn't have adequate space, well ventilated resting and sleeping rooms''. They faced various limitations including insufficient trained teachers, and learning materials and scarcity of supervisory activities. Poor parents were not capable enough to send their children to the private preschools (Tirussew et.al., 2009).Worst enough, rural children were not equally accessible to education as compared to their peers in the urban children

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Currently however, the government seems to expand pre-education systems in the rural areas. The government has tried to develop curriculum, teacher preparation, and attaching the system with its supervisory activities (MOE, 2010).

Over all, Tigray has 3.8 percent (15,130) children enrolled in pre-education out of 396,956 whose ages are appropriate to the groups of 4 -6 years old. (FDRE population census commission, 2008; MOE, 2009/10). As shown in the table below, Tigray's enrolment rate is slightly below the average rate of the country (i.e. 4.8%)

Table 4. Gross enrollment rate of kindergarten at 2009/10 in Ethiopia

Region	Tigray	Adiss Adis	Direda wa	Hareri	Amhara	Oromia	Afar	Somali	SNNP	Benisha ngul	Gambel	Nation
In %	3.8	85	23	15.3	2.4	3.6	1.0	1.6	3.6	3.1	4.5	4.8

Source: FDRE, Ministry of Education (2010). Education Statistics Annual Abstarct: Adiss Ababa .

.This low enrollment rate of pre-education undoubtly affects its educational quality.

Table 5. Educational efficiency outputs of primary education in Tigray(2005/6-2006/7)

Grades	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Repetition rate	2.64	2.49	2.67	2.84	5.58	3.05			3.5
Dropout rate	12.36	8.99	7.77	6.16	10.3	8.7			
Total wastage	14.03	10.77	9.71	9.17	15.41	10.86			
Completion rate				68.3				49.5	

Source: TREB, **2005/6-2006/7**

As indicated above, the minimum out put completion rate; the high result of the dropout rates and repetition rates are more likely resulted from absence of pre-education opportunities in the region Therefore, like any other regions in Ethiopia, introduction of early childhood care and pre-education to rural areas of Tigray could have contributed a lot to improve quality education in the country.

10. METHODOLOGY

To study this problem, the researchers used descriptive study method. It was tried to employ qualitative approach to investigate the status of early childhood education in a particular wereda of Tigray regional State. *Kilteawlaelo* wereda was selected purposefully since this wereda was the pioneers of all rural weredas of Tigray to introduce early childhood education.

The instruments used were observation, group and individual interviews, and document analysis.

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The respondents were two National and one Regional UNICEF officials; one regional early childhood education focal person and one regional education plan expert; and two individuals (one early childhood education focal person and one wereda education head) from the wereda were selected as major informants. Like wise, some five parents including the PTA head, 2 school principals, two teachers and three facilitators of the O-class and child to child were interviewed. Last but not least, both types of children (the child to child and the O-class) were observed and recorded during their class activities.

Tigrigna language have been used to make conversation during the interviewing processes; the responses were also systematically translated to English and make it ready for right up.

Data – Analysis techniques

The data gathered was analyzed using qualitative description method. All data collected was organized and presented based on their similarities.

11. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The Status of Early Childhood Care and Education in Tigray Regional State

To understand the status of Early Childhood Care and Education in Tigray, we have interviewed various informants who directly involve in the program.

A. Respondent A, Representative from Tigray Education Bureau

According to this respondent, the regional pre-education programs have two categories namely the O-class pre-education and the child to child learning approaches: .

A.1 The O-class pre-education

This educational program includes the educational provision of children whose ages are 6. in this program, 67,615 children (male=35,219; female=32,396) are found in 1876 O-classes that are clustered and simultaneously monitored by each regular schools in the respondent's understanding, almost all rural primary schools have established O-class programs to serve for about 50 children each. Each O-class has one teacher who was trained at Adwa teacher Education College for a month. The criteria to teach in this program include sex, age, and grade level, emotional and physical fitness. All teachers are expected to be females; have minimum age of 18; and should complete at least grade 10. The condition of physical and sensori-motor fitness, the status of overall personality and emotional well-being along with the better prior academic achievement of the individual teachers are major criteria of selection for the post of pre-education teacher.

According to Respondent A, the government has the following responsibilities:

- To hire temporary teachers with a monthly salary of 340 birr each.
- To supervise its learning systems using the available supervision task forces

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- Coordinating and mobilizing the weredas, schools and the community
- Providing training for the facilitators

A.2 The Child to Child programs

This child to child pre-education system is an approach to entertain the educational needs of the rural children in their early age (4-5 years of age)**.** This approach is a type of playing and learning arrangements using some local materials, alphabet and pictorial symbols.

There are 69,266 children (male=36,385; female=32,881) learning at 13,853 centers. Each center has estimated to have 5 children. Grade 5 and 6 children are the major facilitators of these groups of children which of course make it child to child supports. It is absolutely no cost classes. Classes are any where around the shades of the neighbors; writing boards are the big stones or any flat metallic substances; sites are the wooden materials or flat stones etc. The child facilitators also don't demand any payment. They work on volunteering services.

Parents and Communities Role on Child to Child Pre-education Systems

- Sending their children to the center
- Selecting the safest center for the children to learn
- Supervising their children's safeness during learning
- Providing learning materials

Constraints Reported: As reported by the Respondent, there were some constraints to be addressed: Some of those constraints were lack of indoor and outdoor games; lack of teacher guidance and student materials; and unavailability of incentives for both types of teachers

B. Respondent B

Discussion was conducted with Kilteawlaelo wereda education authorities about the status of pre-education programs. Individual and focused group discussion was held so far. Accordingly, they have reported that there are a total of 57 O-class centers at the wereda(57 regular primary schools have each O-classes). According to the respondent, the program (i.e. O-Class) has started at *BeatiAkor Tabia through the intervention of UNICEF*. Simultaneously, some *Tabias* such as *Agulae, AbrhaWeatsbaha, Mahbereweini, and Tsigereda* had taken followed to open O-class centers by themselves. Their communities had initially covered the expenses necessary for running the pre-education programs. Many of them have worked in this program for two-three years which they have really proud to see its impacts across the different grades (especially at grades 1-2). In this wereda, there are a total of 2,367 (male=1198, female=1169) O-class students and a total of 4810 (male=2427, female=2383) 4-5 years old children who are entitled to attend in the child to child programs. The children facilitators are expected to teach the 4-5 years old children two times a week although the facilitators are motivated to teach the children every day at evenings.

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According to the respondents, this program has inaugurated regionally to implement as of October, 2000EC.(2010/11).

As to the respondents, this program touches all parents' interest to send and follow their children's learning. It also shows some progresses in their social and academic achievements. It mainly reveals the following changes of behavior in the children:

- Able to solve some emotional and psychological adjustment problems
- Develops the basic skills how to handle and write using pencils
- Develops the habit of using latrines and keeps personal sanitation
- Develops self confidence to actively speak in the class
- Shows better academic performance than their peers who don't pass through pre-education systems.

C. Observation results at *BeatiAkor* pre-education center

BeatiAkor is a small town found 70 kms away from mekelle, the capital city of Tigray. This pre-education center has been found and supported by UNICEF. It has currently 45 children enrolled in the O-class center whose ages are 6 . The center includes the following components:

- Some playing games and latrine facilities
- One O-shaped like learning room that includes some bed sheets for children's nap

It was also observed that the children were writing, drawing and singing as shown in the pictures below

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C.1. Respondents C: the O-class teachers

Two O-class teachers; one from *BeatiAkor* and another one from *Agulae were interviewed about their satisfaction to teach in the area:*

Both pre-education teachers express their happiness to be assigned in this profession they had got satisfaction to help and work with the kids and their parents. However, they reported that the program lacks adequate teaching facilities and many play game materials essential for the children. Especially, *Agulae* O-class lacks children fitted latrine, play field, indoor and outdoor games, ventilated class although the parents are pleased to have such program in their surrounding.

C.2. The child-to-child program

Respondents D: Parents and facilitators response about the child to child program

Child to child pre-education system seems to be more valued by all stakeholders such as the parents, their facilitators, and the government since it motivates children to practice pre-learning activities at their early stage of mental and physical development. The child facilitators are especially in fond of the teaching and singing to the children. For instance, one child facilitator girl said 'yes I love teaching to the children. I follow them daily at the evening'. Another child facilitator (boy) responded as 'In my future I want to be a teacher'. It arose more interest on the facilitators to have involved in teaching profession in their future career.

Some of the parents also reported that they are happy because their children counts numbers, draws, speaks and articulates even some English Alphabets. A father of one child, for instance

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expresses his happiness to get his younger son better reader and writer than the his elder son who didn't pass through this chance of learning.

Look at their kin facilitators how fascinating and committed they are. They work for free and try to feel more responsible to change the pedagogic skills of their children around the open air.



Child to Child facilitators and kids.

In general, this program is believed to improve the academic performances of the children in their latter grades. Many of the education experts from the wereda and the regular schools reported that such system reduces educational wastage (i.e. Reduces dropouts and repetition rates)

D. Respondents E: Interview with the UNICEF coordinators at Tigray and the head office

We have made group interview with country UNICEF at Addiss Ababa and Individual interview with the the Tigray UNICEF authority about the early childhood care and education in the particular Region. Accordingly, the respondents explained how and why UNICEF has dealt with the program issues and problems before going to implement any activities.

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The problems were identified as follows (UNICEF interviewee):

- Ethiopian early childhood intervention was found to be very poor
- Most of the children die very soon before the age of 5
- Malnutrition was found one of the panic problems because of lack of awareness about feeding systems
- There is 23% drop out in grade primary schools
- There is high school readiness problems at grade one
- There is high iodine deficiency

As to these respondents, the above stated problems brought for the integrated activities of the different sectors such as health, education and social which required developing a joint policy framework among the different ministries and nongovernmental organizations. 9 Members from MOE, MOH, MOWA, some representatives of international NGO's, and UNICEF have been established nationally as a working task force for the early childhood intervention activities.

It comes out with policy frame work of early stimulation that consists of 4 components such as parental education, health and early stimulation, preschool education, and non-formal school readiness.

This integrative activities are believed to guarantee child health and education which latter ensures quality education in many aspects. UNICEF has started this program through pilot work at Tigray, Oromoa and Harer regions. This year, the program has expanded to other regions.

According to the UNICEF respondent, it has contributed:

- To rise parental and community awareness to the program;
- Parents were highly involved in the program;
- Develops positive attitude towards learning;
- Improves academic performance;
- Reduces dropouts and repetition rates;
- Develops a sense of volunteerism;

Respondent from the regional UNICEF also replied that UNICEF had contributed to bring this paradigm shift in children's learning L.

> 'It had knocked all doors of the society now'. We have trained 70,000 parents, 46 Wereda education heads, Regional education experts, and 398 teachers to make them aware about and implement at all corners of Tigray both O-class and child-to-child programs. Currently, both facilitators and the children become very active participants in their schools. Most of them become best students in the classes. Many of them stood 1st-3rd .It is possible to say now dropout rates and repetition rates are almost scant with these type of children. It is also worth

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> valued for the facilitators to work in this program as it counts them as one criterion to involve in the school parlama members (Respondent from Regional UNICEF).

UNICEF has taken the initiation and trained many stakeholders who have direct and indirect roles in the programs. As a result, it contributed children to be successful learners in and out of classroom activities.

In general, although the program is believed to improve the academic performances of the children in their latter grades many of the respondents commented that child to child program and O-class reduces educational wastage (i.e. reduces dropouts and repetition rates, and improves completion rate at each regular classes).

12. Conclusion

Different groups of education experts and heads were interviewed in group and individually to examine early childhood intervention practices in Tigray. Some preschools were also observed and video-taped during the process of children learning at O-class sessions and child-to-child programs. In this process, consistent flow of ideas and practices were revealed from top to down hierarchies of the pre-education stakeholders. The reports of UNICEF Head office coincides with the reports of Regional UNICEF and such clarity flow of information went consistently up to the pre-education centers.

It was found that almost all rural weredas of Tigray have introduced the child to child and O-class programs in the attempt to reduce education wastages and to strengthen the basic education processes. Such programs were found to be stimulating for the children as well as their parents. These pre-education programs were found to be helpful to many children to progress in their academic and social activities It raises children's confidence and positive attitude towards learning; increases parental and community awareness to the program; and develops a sense of volunteerism to teaching.

However, appreciating its start, the program has various interrelated challenges to be addressed both by the government and the public:

The preschool education lacks its own standardized text books and other relevant references. Most of them use the formal school texts such as grade 1 text books and the like. It also observed that the teachers seemed to have unclear lesson planes who tried to react sporadically to teach certain words and numbers. The physical setting it self revealed to be unpleasant and unattractive for these groups of children: it lacks adequate spaces for ventilation, resting, and playing; lacks an appropriate chairs, tables, toilets, rooms and play fields.

On top of that, other integrated services such as health facilities, water tapes and other sanitarian requirements were limited.

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A. Positive achievements of the study:

The pre-education program introduced in rural areas of Tigray has many positive achievements. Some of these achievements were presented below:

1. First and foremost, the government has to be appreciated for its production of a National Policy Framework and Strategies of Early Childhood Care and Education in collaboration with the three ministers (ie.MOE, MOH, and MOWA). .
2. It is also a remarkable start to the fundamental change of education in Ethiopia to inaugurate pre-education programs in the rural areas of the country. Previously, almost all pre-education programs had been centered in the urban areas that were owned by the private and faith organizations. Even these pre-schools were used by most of the elites and the haves. Such pre-school establishment at rural places is there fore, an excellent opportunity for all rural children
3. The current practice of attaching both O-classes and child to child centers with the regular schools will have its own contribution to easily magnet/ attract skilled professionals to help the centers improve its learning systems. Most of the pre-schools have closer ties and support with/from the regular schools and teacher education college(for example, Adwa college has provided a month's training to all O-class teachers)
4. The pre-education program was acted as a bridge to have a smooth translation from pre-school education to primary school. It was the foundation to develop most of the basic skills such as writing, speaking, reading, arithmetic skills, etc. important for their subsequent years of life.
5. The program under way catches the attention of the parents' and community's involvement in the system.
6. It improves children's academic and social activities in their future schooling that in turn raises children's confidence and attitude towards learning. Such confidence development and academic progress definitely brings high social interaction in later life of the child. This condition is very fact that almost all children who have passed through the pre-education process were found to score better than the others.
7. It plays a key role to reduce educational wastage (i.e. Reduces dropout and repetition rates) and simultaneously improves completion rates which together warrants to realize UPE and the EFA goals by 2015.
8. Finally, it boosts the motivation and interest of child to child facilitators towards the teaching profession.

Limitations

1. The policy document is not sufficiently publicized at all levels of the government structures. Thus, almost all participants

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didn't know even the existence of the document itself.

2. The document itself doesn't indicate who mandates what. There is a fear that the ECCE program might remain something theoretical that lays at the good will of the sector ministries and the individual authorities.
3. Practically speaking, the work of ECCE program was done in isolation. Collaborative work was not observed so far..
4. The duration of the O-class teacher training was insufficient that children care and education needs somewhat extensive training more than expected.
5. The preschool education under way lacks standard curriculum and sufficient teaching materials. As inferred from the field observation, the children have no books of their own and standardized learning materials with the exception that most of them used grade 1 text books. It also revealed that supporting learning materials (play cards, various reading books, and other play games pleasant and stimulating for the children) were minimal that could help stimulate children's play and mental exercises. In other words, it has over-looked to mix-up the conceptions of the psychological and mental readiness of these groups of children with the formal schooling. Their teaching strategies were wrongly followed to use the teaching methods of grade 1 and upwards (i.e. methods used are not child friendly).
6. Still, it lacks socio-culturally bounded story telling in the teaching materials and in the methods used
7. Most of the pre-school compound has observed to be unpleasant and unfriendly to the children: for instance it lacks adequate spacing for ventilation, children resting, and playing; lacks age appropriate chairs, tables, toilets, ventilated rooms and comfortable indoor and outdoor play fields. On top of that, other integrated services such as health facilities, water tapes and other sanitarian requirements were very limited.
8. With the exception of Adwa College, most of the pre-education schools have low attachment to the colleges and universities.
9. Finally, low salary or absence of teachers and facilitators incentive may affect the morale of an individual staff to stay in the work (for example, 340 birr is paid every month for O-class teachers at

13. Recommendations

The researcher would like to suggest the following possible solutions to make the program as successful as it is expected to be.

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- The preschool education program should have well planned curriculum and text books of its own. Such curriculum should also be supported by various pre-education references and teacher guides that fits the children's mental and psychological readiness.
- It is also a stimulating condition to furnish the classroom with illustrative pictures, drawings, playing games, various puzzles, reading books etc.
- It is also advisable to make the classroom conducive for children's health and safety. It needs to have sufficient spaces, and well ventilated rooms;
- Make the physical environment appropriate for the children's needs and ages rather than trying to fit the children to the environment. Age-sized and appropriate chairs, tables, toilets, rooms and play grounds should be established.
- The condition of the physical and social setting are influencing factors for children since these groups of children are highly sensitive and fast growing ones. Thus, their physical environment should be pleasing to their eyes and mobility. There should be sufficient and green places to play and breath a fresh air from around.
- I recommend to be established a coordinated and integrated activities among the different social and governmental sectors including education, health, and water sectors to create a full-fledged pre-school education systems. .
- Government sectors and other nongovernmental donations need to encourage and support the attempts of the rural Weredas and Tabias with some early childcare and education facilities and equipments.
- Rural development agents, health workers, and social workers need to mobilize villagers to build one neighborhood childcare center using the available materials in the village
- There is a need to raise awareness to the rural parents and communities about the early childcare and education benefits. Such awareness strategies may be linked with the family education that includes caring and rearing practices of a child, the process of

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child feeding systems and the how of keeping personal hygiene and sanitations

- I would like to note that the community elders have many experiences to share the children. such elders must be approached to tell their stories and cultural games
- In order to pull some technical and professional support based on valid research, the pre-schools should have an attachment with their closer colleges and universities.
- Teaching children requires more artistic skill , knowledge and psychological background of child psychology. To grasp these professional and technical skills therefore, it needs to have some couple of years training. A month or even some months training will not satisfy to fully accomplish the mission and objectives of pre-education programs.
- As we all recognize the interest of children, they need to have friendly environment which attracts their attention and development. Thus, their environment should be healthy, green, pleasant and clean. It should also have water, health and toilet facilities that fit their physical and psychological growth.
- Moral and material motivation for the teachers are very demanding and fundamental conditions

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