

The Challenges of Pre-primary Education Organized in Primary Schools of Selected Districts of Jimma Zone

Temesgen Yadeta Dibaba (M.A)

Jimma University, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Teacher Education & Curriculum Studies, Ethiopia

Abstract- The main purpose of the study was to investigate the challenges of preprimary education provided in the primary schools of selected districts of Jimma zone. In so doing, descriptive survey method was employed as an appropriate methodology. Teachers teaching preprimary classes, primary school directors, and pertinent experts from districts education offices, preprimary classrooms and outdoor play areas were used as a source to secure relevant data. Simple random, available and purposive samplings were employed. Questionnaire, observation and interview were the main tools of data collection. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were employed. The findings revealed that implementing preprimary education curriculum in the primary schools, provisions of adequate classrooms and outdoor spaces, materials and equipment supply and organization, acute shortages of professionally skilled and competent teachers, and promoting effective partnerships with parents were the main challenges of preprimary education organized in all primary schools of the studied districts. In conclusion, preprimary education organized in primary schools in the studied districts had been a neglected branch of education. It had never been considered as an integral part of formal education. And, not yet received due attention and support it deserves. Among the study's recommendations, the provision of curricular materials, teachers' awareness raising, organization of classroom and outdoor spaces, materials and equipment, assignment of qualified teachers, in-service training for teachers and strengthen the linkage between parents and preprimary schools could be mentioned.

Index Terms- Preschool children, curriculum, education, in-door, out-door organization primary school

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of human resource is a basic pre-requisite for nation building. Children constitute the most vital base of human resource endowment. Children are the most valuable future citizens of the country. This realization has generated immense interest and creative thinking in the field of child development and education (Curtis, 1998)¹. The provision of early childhood education in the organized preschool institutions have gained a wide recognition that provide desirable educational experiences for children aged three to six. It is believed to lay the foundation for children to develop fully and contribute to their communities in ways that foster economic growth, social stability and prosperity. If the foundation is firmly built, then it is as sound base to benefit both the individuals and the society. Thus, satisfying school experiences during early years are

considered as basic to children's present state and later life (Woodfield, 2004)².

Recognizing the crucial position of children in the future of the society, preschool education becomes a point of common concern in both developed and developing countries. Assumptions about its importance have led to rapid expansion of preschool institutions and in quality of facilities and services (Olatunji, 1990)³. Accordingly in Ethiopia, the issue of preprimary education in the country is viewed as a component of a comprehensive services program for children. These can be seen from the government's emphasis in Education and Training Policy (TGE, 1994)⁴ which states: 'Kindergarten will focus on all round development of the child in preparation for formal schooling.' (Article, 3.2 and sub-article, 3.2.1). Besides, article 3.4 and sub-article, 3.4.5 states:

Teachers starting from kindergarten to higher education will be required to have the necessary teaching qualification and competency in the media of instruction through pre-service and in-service training.

Further, article 3.5 and sub-article, 3.5.3 states, 'The language of teacher training for kindergarten and primary education will be the nationality language used in the area.' Moreover, Ministry of Education (MOE, 2002)⁵, guarantee private individuals, non-governmental organizations, and the community to run preprimary programs that can reduce the demands on the government scarce budgets and provide services for the society.

Likewise in Oromia, based on the Education and Training Policy of the country, the standard for the preschool has been adopted and serve as a cornerstone to guide basic issues that preschool education should address in the region. Besides, the government has been committed to address the issue of children's early years education through expanding not only kindergartens but also by offering educational opportunity in the formal primary school classrooms. Such being the case, there are a number of challenges associated with preprimary education organized in primary schools of Jimma zone. Thus, this study was intended to assess the challenges of preprimary education provided in primary schools in selected districts of Jimma Zone (Jimma town, Manna, Gomma and Kersa).

Statement of the problem

The quality of experiences in the early years, will impact the quality of later life. The initial life experiences may enhance, or retard future development (Chowdhury, & Choudhury, 2002)⁶. By providing a wide range of educational experiences to young children, preschool education, builds background experiences that will promote the later attainment of academic, social, and life skills (Butler, 2001)⁷.

In Ethiopia, the demand for preschool education has increased due to the growing recognition that the program can contribute to all aspects of children's development. Consequently, the issue of preschool education was given important place in the Education and Training Policy of the country to address the needs of preschool children. Based on the policy, in Oromia, kindergarten education as the first formal setup along the educational pathway is acknowledged to benefit children aged four to six. However, in reality it becomes difficult to have all preschool aged children access to kindergartens education. As a result, a preprimary education has been organized in the formal primary school classrooms. The justifications for the organization of preprimary education in the primary school classrooms is to bridge the gap between home and formal school life into which children will enter later. It is also intended to prepare children to start formal school life and promote academic achievement in schools ahead.

Though studies are hardly exist in the area, primary school classrooms observation in Jimma Zone reveals, various challenges associated with preprimary education that calls for attention. Hence, early intervention is vital. Therefore, the analysis of the current practice of preprimary education organized in primary school classrooms will serve as an important source of knowledge and direction for further improvement of the situation. Hence, this study was intended to investigate the challenges of preprimary education organized in the primary schools of selected districts of Jimma Zone (Jimma town, Manna, Gomma and Kersa). In so doing, study would answer the following basic research questions.

1. How far the curriculum of preprimary education was implemented as recommended in the primary school classrooms?
2. How far the classrooms and outdoor spaces organization in the primary schools were conducive for children attending preprimary education?
3. To what extent the materials and equipment of minimum requirements were available in the primary school for children attending preprimary education?
4. Did teachers have the required professional competence in the area of preprimary education?
5. To what extent parent-school relationships were maintained to assist preprimary school children's learning?

Objectives of the study

General objective: -The study was intended to investigate the challenges of preprimary education provided in the primary schools of selected districts of Jimma Zone. Specifically the study was designed to:

- find out the extent to which the curriculum of preprimary education was implemented in the primary school classrooms.
- identify the suitability of classrooms and outdoor spaces organization in the primary schools for children attending preprimary education.
- assess the availability of materials and equipment of minimum requirements for children attending preprimary education in the primary schools.
- examine the professional competence of teachers in the area of preprimary education.

- describe extent to which parent-school relationships were maintained to assist preprimary school children's learning.
- suggest some possible means and ways for further improvement of the situation of preprimary education in the primary schools.

Significances of the study

The findings of the study would be significant in the following ways.

1. To improve the quality of services offered to children attending preprimary education in the primary schools.
2. To inform school administrative bodies those areas that seek attention to enhance preprimary education in the primary schools.
3. To increase the awareness of different levels of education authorities, such as the districts and zone education offices to ensure that at least minimum levels of program quality in preprimary education is maintained in the primary schools.
4. To strengthen parent-school relationships to improve preprimary school children's learning.
5. To serve as a springboard to conduct further and detailed research in the area of preprimary education provided in the primary schools in the region as a whole.

Materials and methods

Research design

In order to get relevant and sufficient information on research problem, mixed research design (quantitative and qualitative design was used). To this effect, a descriptive survey method was employed as an appropriate methodology. The method was selected because it could investigate adequately the challenges of preprimary education provided in the primary school classrooms in selected districts of Jimma Zone so that the intended purpose would be achieved.

Data sources

The main source of data for the study consisted of teachers teaching preprimary, primary school directors, and pertinent experts from districts education offices. In addition, preprimary classrooms and outdoor play areas were used as a source to secure relevant data. Moreover, relevant national and regional education policy documents were used as cornerstones of references of information for the study.

Sampling techniques

In order to obtain adequate samples for the study simple random and purposive samplings were employed. Simple random sampling was used to obtain primary schools providing preprimary education that were included in the samples. This was done by listing their names and drawing the required sample using lottery technique. Hence, twenty-three primary schools were selected as sources of data. Besides, thirty-five teachers teaching primary schools were made to fill the questionnaire. Purposive sampling was used to select informants such as primary schools directors, and districts education offices experts due to their close duties and responsibilities they hold in the area. Accordingly, ten directors and four districts level experts were interviewed. Further, thirteen classrooms and play areas were observed on purposive basis.

Data collection instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative instruments of data collection were used to collect data for the study. These consisted of questionnaire, observation and interview. Multiple instruments were used to check the consistency of information and to gather supplementary ideas, which would never be obtained by one means.

Data analysis

In order to conduct the analysis of data, descriptive statistical analysis such as percentage followed by descriptive statements was used. The data collected through close-ended questionnaires were summarized in tables and analyzed using percentage followed by descriptive statements. In addition, qualitative data collected through interviews, open-ended questionnaire and observation were analyzed using narration and the summary of the words of respondents. Finally, summary, conclusions and recommendations was made.

Data presentation, analysis and discussion

The data collected through close-ended questionnaires were presented in tables for each case, and analyzed using percentage followed by relevant discussions. Besides, qualitative data were used to supplement and explain quantitative data whenever necessary. This had been done under four main themes/headings. These were the extent of preschool curriculum implementation, adequacy of classroom and outdoor spaces, materials and equipment, and its organization, adequacy and professional competence of preprimary teachers and the extent of parent-school relationship to assist children’s learning in the primary schools.

1. **The extent of preprimary curriculum implementation in the primary schools**
2.
 - 1.1. **The main objectives of the curriculum**

Table 1: The main objectives of the curriculum in the schools

Objectives of the curriculum	Respondents in	
	No.	%
Social development	5	14.3
Intellectual development	19	54.3
Physical development	8	22.8
Emotional development	3	8.6

As indicated in table 1 above, the great majority of respondents 19 (54.3%), selected intellectual development followed by physical development 8 (22.8%). Small number of respondents 5(14.3%) and 3(8.6%), selected social and emotional development respectively. This show that intellectual of children was more targeted at in the studied primary schools. Whereas, physical, social and emotional developments of children were least emphasized. Besides, the interview conducted with school directors, made clear that greater attention given to the intellectual and physical development of children than the rest. The evidence given was to prepare children for primary education. The objectives of preprimary education should not be limited or narrowed to intellectual development alone to prepare children for primary education. Such emphasis may be academically effective but may constrain the child’s development in physical, social and emotional areas. Thus emphasis to all areas will provide rich experiences in living and learning. Therefore, the objectives of the curriculum lack focus on social and emotional development of children. The lack of balance to address the social and emotional development of children in the studied primary schools, might lead to lack of harmonious development of children’s personality. Although, the nature of balance is a key focus of debate, many early years educators appropriately highlight a holistic nature of young children's development.

1.2. The availability of preprimary school curricular documents

Table 2: The availability of preprimary school curricular documents

Types of document	Alternative	Responses in	
		No.	%
Syllabus	Available	3	8.6
	Not available	32	91.4
Teacher’s guide	Available	-	-
	Not available	35	100
Physical Education	Available	-	-
	Not available	35	100

As indicated in table 2 above, the great majority of respondents 32(91.4%) indicated the absence of syllabus in their schools. Only 3(8.6%) of the respondents indicated the presence of syllabus in their schools. The responses revealed that syllabus does not exist in most of primary schools. Besides table 2, shows the absence of teacher’s guide and student textbook. Respondents were asked to write what curricular materials they use in the absence of these documents. They said that primary school grade one syllabus, teacher’s guide and textbooks had been used. In addition, during the interview the directors underlined the acute absence of curricular materials. The absence of these essential curricular materials such as syllabi, teacher’s guide, and related materials that serve as a cornerstone to guide children’s education were scarcely available in most kindergartens. The lack of essential curricular materials might make teachers to rely on personal whims in formulating objectives, selection of contents, methods, and assessment procedures. Nevertheless, mere personal impressions could not meet the demand of preschool education. It is clear that curricular documents should match the diverse nature of the learners. However, the data

revealed that primary schools had been using curricular documents which were beyond the maturity level of the children. This had little pedagogical significance.

1.3. The emphasis of the contents of the curriculum

Table 3: The emphasis of the contents of the curriculum

Area of learning	Responses in	
	No.	%
Aesthetic and creative	6	17.1
Environmental Science	5	14.3
Mathematics	7	20
Languages	13	37.2
Physical Education	4	11.4

As indicated in table 3 above the great majority of respondents 13 (37.2%), selected languages followed by mathematics 7 (20%). Some respondents 6 (17.1%) selected aesthetic and creative. Small number of respondents 5 (14%),

Table 4: The most commonly used teaching methods

Teaching method	Respondents in	
	No.	%
Explanation	18	51.4
Question and answer	8	22.9
Discussion	4	11.5
Play	5	14.2
Field trip	-	-
Learning by doing	-	-
Role Playing	-	-

As shown in table 4 above the majority of respondents 18(51.4%), indicated explanation, followed by question and answer 8 (22.9%). Some respondents 5(14.2%), and 4(11.5%) indicated play and discussion respectively. This shows that explanation, and question and answer were the most commonly used teaching methods in most of the preprimary education in the studied primary schools. Whereas, the rest methods were ignored. Besides, during observation the researcher witnessed in most classrooms more direct teaching and specific academic instruction with emphasis on telling, reading, showing and asking than the use of other methods. Questions flow from the direction of teachers only. Children were not encouraged to ask. Individual and cooperative learning were less observed. Children were never included in all activities to the best of their abilities. The use of techniques which foster motivation and engagement were less observed. Further, the interviewed directors agreed to the dominance of explanation, and question and answer; for the lack of teaching materials, absence of assistant teachers, lack of knowledge on the part of teachers how to teach young children. Hence, the use of child directed methods like play, discussion, role-playing, field trip and learning by doing provide opportunities for first-hand experiences, activities, discovery, exploration, experimentation and multi sensory approaches. These methods promote independence, cooperation,

and 4 (11.4%) selected environmental science, and physical education respectively. This demonstrates that the contents of preprimary education in the studied primary schools were emphasized on languages and mathematics. Whereas, emphasis in the areas of physical education, environmental science, and aesthetic and creative were low.

In the studied primary, greater schools emphasis was placed on languages and mathematics. In fact, introducing children to letters, numbers, and other language skills will give them easy entry into primary school. But, when preprimary education are much concerned with the teaching of specific subjects, it may lead to lack of building background experiences that will promote the attainment of academic, social and life skills. As a result, the content of the school curriculum lack a broad base of emphasis on experiences and activities with exposure to a variety of areas to build a firm foundation for later knowledge, attitudes and skills of children in the studied primary schools.

1.4. The most commonly used teaching methods

responsibility, consideration, tolerance and respect for the right of all others.

On the other hand, in most of the studied primary schools, teacher directed attempt dominate rather than child-initiated learning that is the education of preprimary school children. The trends seem to become more academic and structured through the use of more books or specific instructional activities intended to improve children’s achievement in first grade depending solely on prescribed material. But, one must be sure that verbal explanation or description does not make much sense to preschool children. Because, at this stage children learn more from what they can see, hear, feel and do for the fact that the more senses brought into use, the greater the amount of learning that take place.

It is clear that factual information does not ensure the kind of experiences needed for young children in a world of continuous change. Children need to have a foundation how to understand concepts, apply skills, solve problems, work cooperatively, and take responsibility for their learning. Thus, the current more reliance on explanation and question and answering methods more of teacher directed in the studied primary schools, less guarantee to lay firm foundation for children.

1.5. Utilization of instructional materials by teachers

Table 5: The degree of instructional materials utilization by teachers

Degree of utilization	Respondents in	
	No.	%
Always	16	47.7
Sometimes	19	52.3
Not at all	-	-

The above table 5, shows the majority of respondents 19 (52.3%), slightly more than half replied they use instructional materials utilization sometimes. Whereas, the rest respondents 16(47.7%), said they use instructional materials always. This implies, they use instructional materials sometimes in most of the studied primary schools. However, direct classroom observation indicated the researcher, acute shortage of materials and teachers' dependency on picture reading, sound-letter association, letter naming and word discrimination from books, written on the sheet of papers or blackboard. Besides, most of the interviewed directors were never denied the critical shortage of instructional materials in the schools.

The utilization of appropriate instructional materials provide opportunities for children to broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding. Instructional materials support children's self initiated learning, stimulates interests, awareness and imagination. Consequently, the utilization of proper instructional materials by teachers in the schools enhances the effective implementation of the curriculum. Thus, the teachers' attempt of utilizing instructional materials seems to be hampered by acute shortage of essential materials in the schools.

1.6. The most commonly used assessment techniques

Table 6: The most commonly used assessment techniques

Assessment technique	Respondents in	
	No.	%
Test	11	31.4
Observation	6	17.1
Class Participation	6	17.1
Daily attendance	7	20
Writing and drawing work	5	14.2

As depicted in table 6 above the majority of respondents 11(31.4%), selected test as the most commonly used assessment technique followed by daily attendance 7(20%). Class participation and observation each accounted equally 6(17.1%) by respondents respectively. Small number of respondents 5 (14.2%), selected writing and drawing work of children. This indicates that test was the most commonly used assessment technique followed by daily attendance. In contrast, observation, class participation, writing and drawing work of children, daily attendance and observation were the least used techniques of assessment in most of the studied primary schools in the education of preprimary children. Further, the use of observation results in more accurate findings and does not threaten the child's sense of safety and active exploration. Formal tests do not fit the nature of young children. In addition, more reliance on test, daily

attendance and class participation, provide partial information about children's performance. For, it never takes into account the activities of young children, which are equally important in the outdoor environment. As a result, it lacks validity and reliability to identify the interests, needs, and problems of children so that appropriate indoors and outdoors activities to individuals and groups of children, will be planned and provided. Therefore, appropriate assessment techniques that provide complete picture of children both in the classroom and outdoor environments were not used in most of the studied primary schools in the education of preprimary children.

1.7. The most commonly used children's record keeping system

Table 7: The most commonly used children's record keeping system

Types of record	Responses in	
	No.	%
Anecdotal	3	8.6
Admission	4	11.4
Daily attendance	28	80

As revealed in table 7 above, the great majority of respondents 28(80%), indicated the use of daily attendance. Some of the respondents 4(11.4%), indicated admission record, and very small number of respondents 3(8.6%), indicated

anecdotal record. This shows that daily attendance was the main record keeping system mostly used in the studied primary schools in the education of preprimary children. Besides, it was also observed by the researcher that in all daily attendance and

admission record were the only available records about the child. Daily attendance was used for checking regular attendance of each child. While admission record, was used for registration each child in to the school. Besides, records for each child containing all significant data, concerning assessment, educational plans, special reports and records of progress less prevail.

Further, most of the interviewed directors admitted the inadequacy of keeping record for each child. The rationale behind were the lack of know- how on the part of teachers that made keeping appropriate record for each child difficult in the school. In the studied primary schools were not accustomed to keep appropriate records of children’s progress in order to have information ready to transfer with child from year to year. An individual profile, which includes pertinent information about the child’s performance in the curriculum areas, estimates of social and emotional adjustments, family background and examples of his/her work were not available. They use daily attendance and

admission records, which provide a very little information about the child and that never, reflect a complete picture of the child. The habit of compiling and using records for academic guidance and to share concerns with parents was not practiced. Therefore; appropriate records containing reliable, accurate, and well organized information were not kept in the education of preprimary children in the studied schools. The lack of which might make difficult to provide academic guidance, to share concern with parents, and to achieve continuity in the children’s educational progress.

II. ADEQUACY OF CLASSROOM AND OUTDOOR SPACES, MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT, AND ITS ORGANIZATION

2.1. Adequacy of classroom space, materials and equipment and its organization

Table 8: Classroom space, materials and equipment and its organization

Item	Responses					
	Adequate		Inadequate		Non-existent	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Space provided per child	9	25.7	26	74.3	-	-
Organization of activity centers	-	-	3	8.6	32	91.4
Supply of materials in the centers	-	-	5	4.3	30	85.7
Arrangement of materials	-	-	7	20	28	80
Access for utilization	-	-	6	17.1	29	82.9
Tables, chairs and shelves	2	5.7	33	94.3	-	-

The first item in table 8 above reveals classroom space provided per child. Then, the majority of respondents 26(74.3%), judged classroom space provided per child was inadequate. The remaining number of respondents 9(25.7%), said adequate. This shows that the inadequacy of classroom space provided per child in most of the primary schools. Besides, as observed by the researcher, the problem of classroom space differs from school to school. In some schools such as Hermata, Yebu and Ras Dasta large number of children over sixty (60) was observed attending their education. While, in some schools such as Buture and Garuke the rooms were not primarily built for classroom purpose. They were built initially either for office or other purposes but used as classroom for education of preprimary school children. Amazing in Agaro No. 2 instructional resource centre was used as a classroom. As a result, the classrooms were so much compacted and unable to accommodate children. In the studied primary schools, the classroom space provided per child was under sized resulting in crowded class either due to large number of children in each class above the standard or small size of classroom below the standard to accommodate children. Therefore, it is evident to say that the classroom space under which both teachers and children work, greatly affects the success of the objectives of the program. Likewise, based on the responses obtained most of the studied primary schools were unable to provide appropriate classroom working space for the group of children attending. This likely to limit, children’s attending and engagement in tasks and creates tensions for both

teachers and children to work with satisfaction. This in turn affects the proper achievement of the objectives of the program. Regarding the organization of activity centers or corners in the classroom, table 8 indicates, the great majority of respondents 32 (91.4%), judged the organization of activity centers as non-existent. The rest very small number of respondents, 3 (8.6%), judged it as inadequate. This reveals that the organization of activity centers in most of primary schools non-existent.

Table 8 also depicts the supply of materials in the centers, non-existent, for the vast majority of respondents 30(85.7%), judged it. Only small number of respondents 5(14.3%), judged it as inadequate. This indicates the supply of materials in the activity centers in the primary schools was on-existent. The researcher also witnessed the fact that in observed primary schools, there were no clearly defined activity centers. Materials of all sorts such as literary, manipulative, construction, aesthetic, creative and natural materials were lacking. The only available materials were; limited number of charts, and small mounted pictures hang-up or posted on the wall. The habit of collecting natural objects easily available from local environment was minimum. Directors were also interviewed, and they reacted; to the financial constraints to supply it with required materials, lack of interest and know how on the part of teachers to organize the centers.

There is no doubt that organization of activity centers and supply of adequate materials and equipment in the centers, are crucial aspect in determining the effectiveness of preschool

program. It provides ample opportunities for children to gain experiences and skills in handling materials, try out and develops their creative and explorative urges, discover and test possibilities of learning that promote the attainment of the objectives of the program.

Indeed, the use of carefully resourced activity centers in the classroom promotes the attainment of the objectives of the program. On the contrary, the lack or absence, as in the studied primary schools, undoubtedly, can retard or inhibit the attainment of objectives of the program as recommended. In general, based on the results, it would be possible to infer that the organization of activity centers and the supply of materials and equipment almost all primary schools were inadequate. This being the case, most children were undoubtedly, unfortunate to have wide opportunities for first-hand experiencing, discovery, exploration, experimentation and the use of multi sensory approach. Further, it hampers effective use of appropriate teaching methods and assessment techniques, limits the roles of teacher and children as well as proper implementation of the curriculum.

As to an orderly arrangement of the available materials and equipment in the classroom, table 8 shows, most respondents 28(80%) judged the arrangement was non-existent. While, the remaining number of respondents 7(20%), judged it as inadequate. This shows that the available materials and equipment in most schools were not arranged properly.

Related to an orderly arrangement of materials and equipment table 8 reveals, access to the utilization of the available materials and equipment was found to be inadequate for the majority of respondents 29(82.9%) judged it as non-existent. The remaining 6(17.1%) of respondents judged it as inadequate. This reveals access to the utilization of the available materials and equipment in most schools was either non-existent or inadequate. It was also observed by the researcher, that the scarcely available literary materials, toys, and equipment in very limited schools were not arranged by types of activity, concepts, and sequentially. These were placed at one corner of the room. Chairs / benches and tables were arranged in rows, even though

free movement seems difficult. Therefore, the arrangement of the materials available could not provide easy self serving approach in the studied primary schools.

The last, but not the least, worth considering in classroom organization was the availability of child-sized tables, chairs/benches and shelves. Table 8, depicts where the majority of respondents 33(94.3%), judged tables, benches and shelves as inadequate. The rest number of respondents 2 (33%), judged it as adequate. This reveals, in most of the studied primary schools, chairs/benches, tables and shelves were inadequate. Besides, it was observed by the researcher, that in almost all primary schools a single bench was shared among three or four children that were prepared for primary school students. Besides, the benches and tables were not appropriate in relation to developmental level of children and not comfortable for use. Exceptions were noted in Mendera where children were provided with chair, proper height to children.

In order to meet the needs of young children in the preprimary education, calls for appropriate kinds of equipment, which are essential for the program. Tables, benches / chairs and shelves must be selected to meet the needs of kindergarten children. They must afford an opportunity for children to sit and work comfortably. The equipment needs to be suitable for use and adequate for the group of children attending. The inadequacy of the equipment, as in the most of studied primary schools, tends usually to create discomfort and fatigue, which invite children to lack of attention and concentration to their own learning. It would also open the door for the occurrence of misbehavior. Therefore, appropriate child-sized tables, chairs/benches, and shelves were inadequate in most of the kindergartens for the children's attending in the centers. The inadequacy might hamper the achievement of educational objectives intended in these kindergartens, as recommended.

2.2. Organization of outdoor space, materials and equipment

Table 9: Outdoor space, materials and equipment and its organization

Item	Responses					
	Adequate		Inadequate		Non-existent	
	No.	%	No.	%	%	%
Outdoor space and playground	10	28.6	25	71.4		
Safety condition	9	25.7	26	74.3		
Supply of equipment			3	8.6	32	91.4
Selection of equipment			2	5.7	33	94.3
Arrangement of equipment	5	14.3	30	85.7	-	-
Durability of equipment	7	20	28	80	-	-

Regarding outdoor space and playground, table 9 indicates, the majority of respondents 25(71.4%), judged outdoor space and playground as inadequate. Whereas, the remaining number of respondents 10(28.6%), judged it as adequate. Besides as to, the safety conditions of playground, the majority of respondents 26(74.3%), judged its safety as inadequate. Whereas, the remaining number of respondents 9 (25.7%), judged it as adequate. The responses obtained show that outdoor space and playground as well as its safety conditions were inadequate in

most of primary schools was not adequate for the preprimary children. As observed by the researcher, except for Mendera there was no separate play ground the available for preprimary school children. The safety conditions were also poor for broken parts; stones, end edges and other unnecessary materials were found occupying many spaces. Further, directors were interviewed and explained the reason for inadequacy of outdoor space. Then they said that there was lack of clear direction for the organization of separate play ground. They had admitted, the

problem of safety conditions was due to lack of attention from the schools.

It is evident that outdoors space and playground as well as its safety have been identified as a powerful tool for play and development of children. The range and qualities offered can have significant impact on children’s opportunities for learning. Ideal equipment and materials are of little value without adequate playground and if children do not feel emotionally safe and relaxed to explore and move around freely. Hence, there should be plenty of open space and playground with physical and psychological safety and security for children. Since, children need to be protected from danger. Such being the case, the lack of adequate outdoor space and playground as well as its safety, as in most of the studied primary schools, limit children’s opportunities to investigate and explore their environments; to learn to live with peers, to interact freely with materials and equipment available. Therefore, the outdoor space and playground as well as its safety found to be inadequate in almost all primary schools. This would limit children’s possibilities for play, to exercise and develop physical skills, to build self-confidence, and competence, which are the main goals of preprimary school education program.

With respect to the supply of outdoor materials and equipment, table 9 reveals, almost all respondents 32(91.4%), judged the supply non-existent. The rest respondents 3(8.6%) judged it as inadequate. In the same vine, table 9 also indicates where the vast majority of respondents 33 (94.3%) judged the selection of outdoor play materials and equipment as non-existent. While, some respondents 2 (5.7%), judged it as inadequate. In both cases, the responses indicated that the supply and selection of outdoor play materials and equipment as nonexistent or were inadequate. Direct observation of playground by the researcher, also justified the critical shortage and lack of selection of play equipment in the kindergartens. Equipment of minimum essentials like balance, tricycle, crawling tunnels, climbing frames, swinging, etc. were not available in almost all schools. In addition, the interviewed directors never denied the acute shortage of outdoor play equipment, but raised budget

constraint. So the supply and selection of outdoor play materials and equipment were not adequate. As a result, children might be found in depressed situations to have their individual and group interests for play never met. This might affect adversely children’s opportunities for developing a wide range of social skills, physical coordination and mental discipline as well as competence.

As to the arrangement of the available outdoor play materials and equipment, table 9 depicts, the greater number of respondents, 30(85.7%) judged the arrangement as inadequate. Whereas, the remaining number of respondents 5(14.3%), judged it as adequate. Concerning durability of the available outdoor play materials and equipment, table 10 shows the great majority of respondents 28(80%), judged the durability as inadequate. In contrast, the rest number of respondents 7(20%), judged it as adequate. The responses revealed that both the arrangement and durability of the available outdoor play equipment were inadequate in almost all primary schools. It was also observed by the researcher, the outdoor play materials and equipment was not available outside. It is known that the arrangement and durability of outdoor play materials and equipment can stimulate play. When each item is durable children can use it without fear for longer time. When equipment is placed properly children can play without interfering with other play group. In addition, proper arrangement can make possible for the teacher to give help when help is needed and to carryout effective supervision. Therefore, the arrangement and durability of the outdoors play materials and equipment was found to be inadequate in most schools.

III. ADEQUACY AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF TEACHERS FOR PREPRIMARY CLASSES

3.1. Teacher’s assignment in to preprimary classes

Table 10: Teacher’s assignment in to preprimary classes

The system of assignment	Respondents in	
	No.	%
Voluntary assignment	6	17.1
School administration forced school assignment	29	82.9

As shown in table 10 above the great majority of teachers 29(82.9) were assigned to teach preprimary school children by school administration. Only 6(17.1%) of teachers were assigned to teach in the preprimary classes based on their interests. Respondents were required to write the reason for their assignment. Most of them said that the school administration assigned them as demotion due ascribing to lack of efficiency.

Most teachers were assigned to teach preprimary children without their interests. It is known that the teacher is a key person in teaching-learning process. Particularly, teacher’s interest play vital role to the success of school program.

3.2. Training of teachers

Table 11: Teachers’ training for preprimary education

Have you been trained?	Responses in	
	No.	%
Yes	2	5.7

No	33	94.3
----	----	------

As indicated in table 11 above, most of the respondents 33(94.3 %), were not trained for preprimary education. Only 2 (5.7%) had training in preprimary education. This reveals that almost all the teachers in the assigned to teach preprimary schools were not trained as a teacher in the preprimary education. Rather they were trained to teach primary schools. Further, to

identify the availability of opportunity for in-service training and refresher courses respondents was asked.

3.3. Opportunity for in-service training of teachers

Table 12: Availability of opportunity for in-service training of teachers

Do you frequently get in-service training?	Respondents in	
	No.	%
Yes	-	-
No	35	100

As revealed in table 12 above, all respondents 35(100%), said there was no an opportunity for in-service training. This shows that the absence of opportunity for in-service training or refresher courses for all teachers who were assigned to teach preprimary children. Besides, the interviewed directors had expressed the absence of in-service training provided for teachers. Directors said that this had created lack of self-confidence and feelings of inadequacy in their profession among those teachers who were assigned to teach preprimary school children. In-service training is an essential part of the on-going work and development of preschool education. Both qualified and unqualified teachers need to have access to up-to-date information that enables them aware of standards required at all times. Periodic refresher courses, workshops, seminars, and conferences are required so that teachers can keep themselves abreast of current trends and research and their application to understanding of children and curriculum development. In-service training should not be seen merely as a way of bringing teachers up-to-date. Training that is worthwhile, will offer more than that. It will allow teachers to look critically at their own practice and identify strengths and weaknesses in it along with ways of moving forward. Preprimary school teachers are required to be alert to all educational implications in all

experiences and at all times. Hence, in-service training is expected to equip teachers with newer and better teaching procedures that will help them carry out their professional responsibilities effectively. However, in the studied primary schools, an attempt made to improve the professional skills and expertise of teachers through relevant on-going professional development was limited. An effort made to bridge the gap created due to the absence or shortage of pre-service training to meet children’s need through in-service training was very minimal. Teachers’ hardly had opportunities to upgrade and acquaint themselves with changes and innovations in the system. Thus, the opportunities for in-service training of teachers were minimal and limited. This situation therefore would have a negative impact on the performance of the teachers, which in turn affects children’s learning as a whole in the studied primary schools.

IV. THE EXTENT OF PARENT – SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP TO ASSIST CHILDREN’S LEARNING

4.1. The existence of parent-school partnership

Table 13: The existence of parent-school partnership

Is there parent-school partnership?	Respondents in	
	No.	%
Yes	12	34.3
No	23	65.7

As depicted in table 13 above, the great majority of respondents 23(65.7%), indicated the absence of partnership to assist children’s learning. Whereas, the rest respondents 12(34.3 %), indicated the existence of partnership. The responses revealed the lack of partnership in most of the studied primary schools. In this respect, both directors were interviewed to express their views. Directors have admitted the lack of partnership to assist children’s learning. As to many directors, on one hand, most parents have limited knowledge and experiences about the objectives or purposes and methods of preprimary education. As a result, they did not realize the importance of the

link between parent and school. Thus, they have left every responsibility to kindergarten teachers considering themselves as if they cannot contribute anything to education of their children. On the other hand, some teachers’ lacks know- how to work with parents. For this, they blame their lack of practical training to work with parents in teacher education institutions. Some other teachers, lack commitment, initiatives, and responsibility to form partnership with parents.

It is clear that parent-school partnership in early years, is immense important for children’s overall development. Preprimary school working in isolation from parent is impotent.

Cooperation between both parties will benefit the kindergarten, the parent and the child. Benefits to the school include, it fosters parents' positive attitudes toward the school so that they can support the effort of the institution in such ways as fundraisers, resource persons, decision makers and implementers. Benefits to the parents include they can understand the purposes and methods of kindergarten and work constructively with teachers. They can also have a chance to gain more realistic pictures of their child's strengths and weaknesses. Children are also benefited from joint work of institutions for their welfare. It can foster confidence, independence and increases the chance for greater achievement and stimulates wholesome attitudes toward the teachers and the program. However, in most of the studied primary schools, the results indicated the existence of rift between parents and schools to maintain proper partnership. Many of the schools failed to promote the idea that parents are an integral part of children's education. Parents also lack clear

awareness about the objectives and activities of the school to work together effectively and harmoniously. In addition, some teachers lack training in using effective communication skills and strategies to overcome knowledge barriers and gain support from parents. Professional commitment to communicate with parents and an attempt to share responsibilities for children's educational success seems minimal.

Hence, there was a lack of effective parent-school partnership to assist children's learning in the studied primary schools. Working with parents had never been prioritized in most schools. As a result, getting their full cooperation was a great challenge. The lack of such an essential ingredients might contribute to children's poor adjustment and performance to meet their own goals in the studied primary schools.

4.2. Means of communication used with parents

Table 14: The most commonly used means of communication with parents

Means of communication	Respondents in	
	No.	%
A forum for parent education	-	-
Meetings and discussion		-
Telephone calls	-	--
Parental visits		
Conferences		
Written letters	1	2.9
Children's circulating books	2	5.7
Verbal messages	32	91.4

As revealed in table 14 above, most of the respondents 32(91.4%), indicated verbal messages. Children's circulating books and written letters were indicated by 2(5.7%), and 1(2.9%) of the respondents respectively. Parental visits, conferences, telephone calls, meeting and a forum for parent education were not selected. The responses indicated that a verbal message was the most commonly used means of communication in most of the kindergartens. In contrast, children's circulating books, parental visits, conferences, meetings and discussions, and a forum for parent education were the least used means of communication for parents to participate. As to many of the interviewed directors, the only available means of communication with parents were attendance at annual parents meetings at the beginning and end of the year. In these meetings, due to time constraints and other reasons, parents were often rushed and enforced teachers passing on information. This leaves little room for discussion or debate and made communication one directional and less effective. Effective means of communication between parents and preprimary school is essential to exchange information and

develop links in ways that values and respects the contributions of the children, their family and the setting. On the contrary, in the studied primary schools, the mechanisms through which the schools work and underlying values were not a well established features. An attempt made to use a forum for parent education, conferences, meetings and discussions, parental visits, and the use of children's circulating books which are very effective means of communication found to be one of the most difficult aspects of their work. For partnership to be maintained it would be vital that effective communication strategies to facilitate two directional communication and support should be used; where both parties share mutual accountability, responsibility and mutual gains. Therefore, the means of communication used in almost all schools, for parents to participate were found to be less effective. It never invites parents to play a direct role in the education of their children.

4.3. Parents participation in the management of the school

Table 15: Parents participation in the management of the school

Are parents an integral part of management?	Respondents in	
	No.	%
Yes	3	8.6
No	32	91.4

As indicated in table 15 above, most of the respondents 32(91.4%), replied that there was no parental participation in the management aspects of the school. Whereas, small number of respondents 3(8.6%), replied the existence of parental participation. The responses revealed that in most of the studied primary schools, there was no parental participation in the management system of the school. In addition, most of the interviewed directors, clarified the absence of parental involvement in the management aspects of many preprimary education was due to much emphasis given to primary school education and lack of encouragement from the schools. It is obvious that the government has legislated for parents to be on the governing bodies and to be partners in the business of running their children's schools. Such partnership although in theory ideal, had not been realized to any great extent in practice in most of the primary schools.

Major findings, conclusions and recommendations

Major findings

In brief the following were major findings of the study.

A. The extent of preschool curriculum implementation in the studied primary schools was found to be low. The findings disclosed that the objectives of the curriculum lack focus to address the physical (22.8%), social (14.3%), and emotional (8.6%), development of children in the schools. Besides, the implementation of the contents of the curriculum lack a broad base of emphasis in natural sciences (41%), and aesthetic and creative (19%), areas to build a firm foundation for later attainment of academic, social and life skills. Further, the preprimary education curricular materials were absent in almost all primary schools. Thus, primary school grade one syllabus, teacher's guide and textbooks had been used. Moreover, play (14.2%), discussion (11.5%), learning by doing, role playing, and field trip were the least used instructional methods. Above all, class participation and observation each equally (17.1%), writing and drawing work of children (14.2%), were the least used assessment techniques that would fit the nature of young children. Finally, anecdotal record (8.6%) that could provide accurate and reliable information about the child's performance was the least used.

B. Classrooms and outdoor spaces, materials and equipment, as well as its organization in the studied primary schools was found to be inadequate. The findings revealed that classroom space provided per child was found to be inadequate (65.7%). In addition, the organization of activity centers (91.4%), and the supply of materials and equipment in the centers (85.77%), was non-existent. Further, appropriate (child-sized) tables and chairs/ benches, for the group of children attending in the schools were found to be inadequate (94.3%). The outdoor space and playgrounds (71.4%), and its safety conditions (74.3%), were also found to be inadequate. Moreover, the supply of play materials and equipment (91.4%), and its selection (94.3%), were found to be non-existent.

C. Teachers professional skills and competencies to effectively carry on a sound preprimary education found to be low. The study indicated that the great majority of teachers (82.9) were assigned by school administrations that were considered less competent in teaching primary school children. The great majority of teachers (94.3 %), had no training and limited

experiences in preprimary children education. All teachers (100%), teaching preprimary children had no opportunity for in-service training or refresher courses to improve or up-date their professional skills and expertise to work effectively in the preprimary education. An assistant teachers were not available in all (100%), primary schools.

D. The extent of parent-school relationships to assist children's learning in the studied primary schools was found to be low. The findings demonstrated that there was a lack of effective parent-school partnerships (65.7%), to assist children's learning. Children's circulating books, written letter, parental visits, conferences, telephone calls, meeting and a forum for parent education were the least used; that could invite parents to play a direct role in the education of their children. Parental participation or involvement in the management aspects of the school systems was almost non-existent (8.6%).

V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study the following were the main challenges of preprimary education organized in primary schools of the studied districts of Jimma Zone.

1. Implementing preprimary education curriculum in the primary schools was the main challenges of primary schools of the studied districts.
2. Provisions of adequate classrooms and outdoor spaces, materials and equipment supply and organization were other great challenges of primary schools of the studied districts.
3. Acute shortages of professionally skilled and competent teachers were also the primary challenges of preprimary education organized in all primary schools of the studied districts.
4. Promoting effective partnerships with parents was also among the great challenges of preprimary education organized in all primary schools of the studied districts.

In conclusion any program that is instituted on unsound basis, bound to fail even if the original policy was excellent. Undoubtedly, preprimary education organized in primary schools in the studied districts had been a neglected branch of education. It had never been considered as an integral part of formal education. And, not yet received due attention and support it deserves. Unless, the prevailing problems were resolved, any gain that was expected from preprimary education organized in primary schools of the studied districts would be hardly obtained.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the current deficient practices of preprimary education organized in primary schools the following measures need to be taken in the studied districts of Jimma Zone.

1. The use of grade one curricular materials such as subject syllabus, teacher's guide and student textbook for preprimary education was inappropriate. Thus, the Regional Education Office should urgently made provision of curricular materials particularly the syllabi.
2. Until all the required curricular materials reach the schools teachers should use syllabi for selecting content and

- learning experiences from children's environment which are meaningful, functional, and adaptable building on and creating interests in children rather than using grade one syllabi.
3. Provision of preprimary education syllabi calls for concomitant teachers' awareness raising in teaching materials, methods, assessment techniques, and record keeping systems. Therefore, districts Education Office should familiarize teachers in the proper utilization of teaching materials, methods, assessment, and record keeping systems through workshops, seminars, conferences, etc, as soon as possible.
 4. The organization of classroom and outdoor spaces, materials and equipment, play an important part in helping children to acquire the skills and competencies associated with preprimary education provision. Therefore, the school administrative bodies should provide the minimum requirements of spaces and safety conditions for preprimary children. Besides, teachers' initiatives, ingenuity and commitment should be strengthened to prepare instructional materials using low cost or locally available raw materials to improve the shortages. In addition, the use of real objects, specimens, and the nature itself should be encouraged. Further, mobilization of the community to effectively contribute with the available knowledge, skills, and fund could do much to minimize the problems.
 5. Qualified teachers are indispensable to a sound educational program. Therefore, the training of teachers should deserve thoughtful attention from Regional Education Bureau.
 6. In-service training would go a long way in improving the professional competencies of teachers. So, districts Education Office should organize ongoing workshops, seminars, conferences, and otherwise to enhance the professional competence of preprimary education teachers. Besides, teachers by their own commitment, initiatives and concerns should have to look forward to a better professional life and never cease to learn.
 7. Effective parent-school relationship is one of the major features of preschool education. Opportunities for children's learning are strengthened as the connections across the parents; school and community are acknowledged and respected. Therefore, to strengthen the bond between parents and preprimary education organized in primary schools:
 - a) Emphasis on community oriented and greater parental participation should be adopted in the all primary schools.
 - b) Effective strategies for working with parents based on the realities of local environment should be employed by all primary schools.
 - c) Continuous efforts should be made by primary school administration to strengthen the partnership with parents. To this effect, a forum for parent education, meetings and discussions, conferences, home visits, etc, are recommended.
 - d) Parents should also take full advantages of all formal and informal means of communication

- made available to them to work harmoniously and constructively with the primary schools.
- e) Districts Education Office should provide strong supportive services in raising the awareness of the community, placing on the agenda that parent, communities, and schools are an integral part to work cooperatively for ultimate success of preprimary education.
8. Districts Education Office bears enormous responsibilities in running preprimary education. Therefore, it should strictly make sure that a minimal level of requirement in preprimary education program qualities maintained in all primary schools.

Finally, the writer recommends a more detailed and comprehensive studies in the same area to investigate and further strengthen the practices of preprimary education organized in primary schools of the zone as a whole.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alkin. M. (1992). Early Childhood Education. The Encyclopedia of Educational Research (6th ed.). New York : MacMillan Library Reference. V.2, PP.351-360.
- [2] Althouse, R. (1988). Investigating Science with Young Children. New York: Teachers College Press.
- [3] Beaty, J. (1988). Skills for Preschool Teachers (3rd ed.). New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.
- [4] Bruce, T. (1997). Early Childhood Education (2nd ed.). Hodder and Stoughton Publishing Group.
- [5] Butler, A. (2001). Preschool Education. The Encyclopedia of America. Durban: Grolier Publisher.PP.553-555.
- [6] Chowdhury, A & Choudhury, R. (2002). Preschool Children: Development, Care and Education. New Delhi: New Age International (P) Publisher.
- [7] Christine, H & Jill, F. (1999). A Practical Guide to Activities of Young Children. London: Nelson Thornes Ltd.
- [8] CMEC. (1998). Preparation for Learning: Preschool Education. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education and Training.
- [9] Curtis, A. (1998). A Curriculum for Preschool Children: Learning to Learn (2nd ed.). London: Rutledge Publisher.
- [10] Decker, C & Decker, J. (1988). Planning and Administering Early Childhood Programs (4th ed.). Toronto: Merrill Publishing Company.
- [11] Garrick, R. (2004). Playing Outdoors in the Early Years. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- [12] Heffernan, H & Todd, E.(1960). The Kindergarten Teacher. Boston: D.C. Heath and Company.
- [13] Hespe, D. (2002). Early Childhood Education Program Expectations: Standard of Quality. Trenton: New Jersey Department of Education.
- [14] IDRC. (1983). The Relationship between Preschool and Primary Education. Proceedings of Workshop on Preschool Research. Ottawa Ministry of Education and Training.PP.18-50.
- [15] Isenberg, J & Jalongo, M. (1993). Creative Expression and Play in the Early Childhood Education. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- [16] Kuppaswamy, B. (1980). A Textbook of Child Behavior and Development (2nd ed.). New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.
- [17] Kurian, T. (1988). Preschool Education. World Education of Encyclopedia. New York: Facts on Publications. V.1. PP.377-388.
- [18] Miller, P. & McDowelle, J. (1993). Administering Preschool Programs in Public Schools: Practitioners Handbook. California: Singular Publishing Group, Inc.
- [19] MOE. (2002). Education Sector Development Program II (ESDP II). Addis Ababa: MOE.
- [20] (2002). The Education and Training Policy and its Implementation. Addis Ababa: MOE.

- [21] Neaum, S & Tallack, J. (1997). Good Practice in Implementing the Preschool Curriculum. London: Stanley Thornes Publisher Ltd.
- [22] OEBPPS. (2003). Education Statistics Annual Abstract 1995(2002/2003). Education Management Information System. Addis Ababa: Mega Publishing Enterprise.
- [23] Tassoni, P. (2002). Planning for Foundation Stage. Oxford: Heinemann Education Publisher.
- [24] TGE. (1994). The Education and Training Policy. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Enterprise.
- [25] Todd, E & Heffernan, H. (1964). The Years Before School: Guiding Preschool Children. New York: the Macmillan Company.
- [26] Widmer, L. (1970). The Critical Years : Early Childhood Education at the Crossroads. Florida: International Textbook Company.
- [27] Wills, C & Stegeman, W. (1954). Living in the Kindergarten : A Handbook for Kindergarten Teachers. Chicago: Follett Publishing.
- [28] Woodfield, L. (2004). Physical Development in the Early Years. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- [29] Zirpoli, S. (1995). Designing Environments for Optimal Behavior: Understanding and Affecting the Behavior of Young Children. Englewood Cliffs: Merrill Publishing Company.

AUTHORS

First Author – Temesgen Yadeta Dibaba is a lecturer in Jimma University, Ethiopia. Recently serving as Head, Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies, in the College of Education and Behavioral Science. Graduated from Addis Ababa University in M.A Degree in Curriculum Studies worked as a lecturer in Jimma College of Teachers Education and Jimma University for 10 years, engaged in various research undertakings and developed various teaching modules in the field of Pedagogy that have been used in Primary Teacher Education Colleges.

Temesgen Yadeta Dibaba

Address: Cell phone: 0917824022

temesgeny2@gmail.com

Email: