

THE PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES OF PRESCHOOL PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND STAKEHOLDERS' PARTICIPATION IN SNNPRS, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the Practices and Challenges of Preschool Program Organization, Management and Stakeholders' Participation in SNNPRS, Ethiopia. Accordingly, the study aimed in answering the following research questions; namely, stakeholders participation, organization and management practices and challenges of effective implementation of the program and employed descriptive survey research design and methodology and gathered information from primary and secondary sources using qualitative and quantitative approaches. At ultimate stage, 57 preschools were selected from sampled zones using multi-stage cluster sampling. Accordingly, 117 preschool teachers, 57 principals and 487 preschool students were selected as elementary units of sampling. In addition, 8-10 parents, PTAs and community members from selected schools were selected by using availability sampling method and concerned officials and experts from REB, ZEDs and WEOs were included from targeted areas purposively. As instruments, the study used in-depth interviews, questionnaire, FGD, field observation to collect data from respondents. The collected data were analyzed by descriptive statistical techniques of analysis using SPSS software. The result of the study strongly indicated that the organization, management of the program was not promising. In addition, the participation of parents and other stakeholders was also poor. Moreover, there was no separate structure, budget and fully responsible personnel for the program. The study concluded that the problem of above-mentioned factors contributed to low success of program implementation. As recommendation, the concerned stakeholders (REB, ZEDs, WEOs, CTEs, NGOs, private sectors and communities) should work hard in collaboration and integration for the success of the program implementation.

Keywords

Management; Organization; Participation; Preschool; Stakeholders

Introduction

Early childhood education is among the most contributing factors to bring the desired well-founded experience and healthy personality. It is quite important for child's holistic development, particularly in mental, social, language and personal developments. Research pointed out that the advantages of high-quality preschool program include improved school readiness; reduced grade retention; reduced need for costly remedial and special education services; and improved educational test scores and promote long-term educational success (Clark and Waller, 2007).

Education is not optional requirement for early childhood children; rather it is a fundamental right that they are entitled with. The 1990's World Summit on "Education for All" states that regardless of any condition, every person has the right to education. From the six goals aimed at

providing education for every citizen, the first goal states that "expanding and improving early childhood care and education." The summit stressed that governments, NGOs and development agencies have the responsibility to implement the goal. The 2000 Dakar Summit also affirms this. While the Dakar declaration on "Education for ALL" has ended in 2015, the intended goal of achieving "Education for all" is not met yet.

Hence, this issue is still the pressing one around the World. Cognizant of this fact, the fourth goal of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focuses on "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities" especially Article 2 says, "By 2030 ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and Preschool education so that they are ready for

primary education” (UN, 2015). Based on this goal, the sixth Article of the World Education Forum held in Incheon, South Korea entitled “towards inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All” states that “... We ... encourage the provision of at least one year of free and compulsory quality Preschool education and that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care and education” (UNESCO et. al., 2015). This indicates that there is the need to expand the access of preschool education for all children.

In most African countries, education got momentum only after independence from colonialism (Ansell, 2005). But the attention given for Preschools was unsatisfactory until the beginning of 21st century. Ethiopia is among African countries in which the accessibility and equity was low until the last five years. Even if the country adopted New Education and Training Policy two decades ago, the attention given for preschool by the government had been almost null for about two decades. Nor the attention given for the training of quality pre-school teachers was satisfactory except that increasing the duration from 6 month, which was set in 1971 to one year. Studies revealed that the accessibility of preschool education was only about 4% in rural six years ago (Wood Head, 2009). While the government had been expanding primary education dramatically, the provision of early childhood education was almost neglected. Private sectors and religious organization were the sole actors; particularly it has left preschool education only to communities, NGOs and private sector. Since education requires huge investment and the aim of private sector in expanding education is profit maximization, it focused only in urban areas where parents relatively afford to pay for their children’s education. Therefore, currently, there is uneven distribution and quality of preschool education between urban and rural areas. Cognizant of this fact, starting from 2008, the government designed a strategy to expand

preschool education in the country. Accordingly, the “O” class, child-to-child programs, and community and religious organization owned centers were introduced (MoE, 2016), particularly since 2011. The launching of “O” class in government primary schools and community and religious centers has been uplifted the gross enrolment rate from the level of below 10 to 39 as MoE (2016). The government also committed to the extent of preparing policy framework, strategy, guidelines and standards. The policy has classified ECCE in to two parts: prenatal to 3+ years and 4-7 years. The former emphasizes health, stimulation and care in which parents’ role is paramount for the success of this. Ministry of health is given primary mandate to teach parents and community through its Kebele based health extensions. The latter, on the other hand, is named as preschool education in which children are expected to attend schools for at least 4 hours (8:00 A. M- 12 P.M) a day. Ministry of Education is given prime responsibility in implementing the policy.

As one of the regions of the country, Southern Nation Nationalities Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) also has been implementing preschool education in its different forms such as “O” Class in formal primary schools, community and religious organization owned preschools and Child-to-Child and private kindergartens.

Even if, the Regional Education Bureau included the preschool program in its 2nd Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) as a priority area to maximize the access and quality of education, there is no empirical evidence about the organization, management and level of stakeholders participation and how the mentioned hindering factors are mitigated. Good practices that should be scaled up and problems hindering the performance of the program were not well identified. Therefore, this research deals with assessing the organization, management and level

of stakeholders participation in preschool program implementation in SNNPRS, Ethiopia.

Statement of the Problem

Education sector is the area in which Ethiopia has been registered remarkable achievement in the last two decades. The Ethiopian government gave due attention in expanding access to education for all levels of the education system. To attain the targets set by 1990 and 2000 World Summit in Education For All and the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and the subsequent education 2030 Incheon Declaration and the Framework for Action (UNESCO, et.al., 2015), the country took strong and conspicuous measures. Hence, the accessibility of primary education has been realized in most parts of the country. However, the participation of preschool children was low. Although, the country's average GER was above the Sab Saharan Africa (SSA) average in expanding preschool program, it is still lagging behind some African countries such as Ghana (115.1%), South Africa (76.17%) and Kenya (73.79%). It is also behained the world average GER. While the SSA average was 21.87% it was 44.04% at World level (World Bank Group, 2016).

The National Policy Framework considers ECCE program as an intervention strategy to curb the problem of child labor and also as an indispensable means to enhance enrolment in primary schools on equal grounds; increased productivity; cost savings for both the families and the nation; poverty reduction; minimized gender disparity; increased opportunities for parental and community mobilization and empowerment and protect the rights of children (Ethiopian EECE Policy Framework, 2010). However, Pre-school education program is still limited to date to meet the demands of the growing numbers of preschool age children.

In light of the above dispute with the growing demand of preschool program the sector in terms of recognizing the contribution of ECCE for later

development of children, it necessitates the team to undertaking the research to explore the existing practices and challenges of the implementation of the preschool program in the region.

The problem is widespread in rural part of the country where private schools almost lacked. In 2004 the GER of Preschool was 2% - the lowest compared to other African countries. The figure increased to 2.3% in 2006 (MoE, 2006), and 5.4% in 2011 (MoE, 2012). Nevertheless, due to high quality concern in primary school, on one hand, and the need to implement the educational rights of children set in the World Summits on the other, there has been growing concern to expand Preschool education across the country in the last five years. Particularly, the research results unveiled recently on school performance of grade 2 and grade 3 school children across the country by USAID forced the country to think differently and take immediate action to address the problem. The result of the research was quite frustrating. The problem was more magnificent in SNNPR (USAID, 2010). Lack of preschool education has been seen as the major contributing factor. Since then, "O" classes had been opened in primary schools and in other social gatherings (MoE, 2016); and preschool teachers training program was launched at diploma level in CTEs. As a result, the enrolment is relatively increased. In SNNPR, the GER was increased from 3.9 in 2007 to 47.7% in 2015 (SNNPR, 2015). In contrary to this, according to data obtained from MoE Annual Abstract (2007) the GER of SNNPR were 3.0 and increased to 57.0% in 2015. Even though, there was a discrepancy between the national and regional data, both data indicates that there is a progress in the enrolment of preschool children in the region. However, there is high concern with regard to its provision of access to, maintaining equity and ensuring quality of education for all children in the region. In spite of its relative expansion, there are almost 50% of preschool children who are still left behind educational opportunity in the region. Moreover, going to

school by itself does not give guarantee to achieve the goal of making them ready for primary school particularly grade one, which requires investigation through practical research.

Hence, the main purpose of the study is to investigate the practices and challenges of organization, management, stakeholders participation and challenges of Preschool Program in SNNPR region. It assesses the extent and nature of the involvement and commitment of all concerned parties in making preschool environment attractive and conducive for children's holistic development. In so doing, the following basic research questions were raised:

1. How does the preschool program organized and managed in the Region?
2. What is the level of participation of stakeholders in the implementation of the program?
3. What are the challenges for the effective implementation of the program?

Material and Method

Research Design

The main focus of this research is to assess how the preschool program is organized, managed including the extent of Stakeholders participation in the program. It also focuses on sorting out the challenges hindering its implementation of the program. For the purpose of this study, descriptive research design was used to investigate the way the preschool program organized, managed and the level of stakeholders' participation in the implementation of the program. Survey methodology was used to collect relevant data to answer the basic questions because it is useful for non-experimental descriptive designs that seek to describe reality like information on attitudes and behaviors (Mathers N. et. al, 2007).

In this regard, the survey method was applied in this research to determine whether the set objectives of preschool education program have been met or not, to analyze trend of preschool

implementation across time, to describe the status and extent of the program implementation, to establish baseline information on the program implementation in the region. In the survey, both the qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches were employed.

Source of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized to obtain information about the subject under the study. The primary data were collected from people who were involved in implementing and running the program at regional, Zonal, Wereda and school levels; first line administrators (directors and supervisors), preschool teachers and their assistants; parents of preschool children, the local community of preschool education at school level and preschool students. In addition to this, secondary data were collected from Annual Education Abstracts, reports, strategies, different research results and national and regional Preschool Education Frameworks on practices of preschool education.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

This research was carried out across the region of SNNPRS. In order to select the research participants, multistage cluster sampling, purposive sampling and simple random sampling were used.

The study used cluster sampling because samples would be taken from different geographical location (location wise study) and sampling unit may be made at different levels of selection such as units of zones, woreda, kebele and school. In addition, the research team assumed that there might not be up-to-dated list of preschool centers to use other methods of sampling. The further point is that, there was considerable heterogeneity of the implementation of preschool program from zones to zones, woredas to woredas and preschools to preschools. Therefore, the study used cluster sampling at each stage and proportionate cluster sampling to make the size of

elements to be included in the sample proportional to its size.

Accordingly, out of 14 Zones (Sidama, Gedeo, Silte, Guraghe, Hadia, Kembata Tembaro, Wolayta, Gamogofa, Segen, Debub Omo, Dawro, Kafa, Bench Maji and Sheka) of the region, 4 Zones (Sidama, Wolayta, Guraghe and Bench Maji) were selected using cluster sampling. In addition, among 4 special woredas (Basketo, Halaba, Konta and Yem), Halaba Special Woreda was selected by using simple random sampling method. Moreover, Hawassa City Administration was selected purposively to represent the urban setting. To select representative woredas from each zone, special woreda and Hawassa City administration, cluster proportionate sampling method was employed. In this regard out of 76 woredas, 16 were selected for the study. Accordingly, 5 woredas from Sidama, 3 from Guraghe, 3 from Wolayta, 2 from Bench Maji, 1 from Halaba and 2 sub-cities from Hawassa City Administration were selected.

Then, out of 405 schools available in selected woredas and sub-cities, 56 were selected using cluster proportionate sampling (27 schools from Sidama Zone, 12 schools from Guraghe, 10 schools from Wolayta, 5 schools from Bench Maji; 1 school from Halaba and 2 schools from Hawassa). The targeted schools were identified by using cluster proportionate sampling method.

Therefore, the participants of the research were 117 (56 teachers from Sidama, 33 teachers from Guraghe, 18 teachers from Wolayta, 7 teachers from Bench Maji, 1 teacher from Halaba and 2 teachers from Hawassa City Administration) preschool teachers. Assistant teachers of each school were selected by using availability sampling; 57 directors (1 from each schools) were selected by using purposive sampling; 8-10 parents, PTAs and community members from selected schools were selected by using availability sampling method; from the region, education bureau head, Teaching-learning and Assessment Core Process Owners and Preschool

Experts; from zone levels, Zone Education Head, Teaching-learning and Assessment Core Process Owners and Preschool experts; and from woreda, Woreda Education Head, Teaching-learning and Assessment Core Process Owners and Preschool experts were included from targeted areas purposively. In general, the samples that would be selected at last stage were:

- 117 preschool teachers and 57 principals for questionnaire
- 16 preschool experts of woreda from education offices, 4 preschool experts of zonal education departments, 2 preschool experts from Hawassa City Administration Education Department, 2 preschool experts from Halaba Education Office, and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Core Process Owner and Preschool Program Expert from SNNPR Education Bureau for interview
- Parents and community members at each center for FGDs
- Photographs to assure the reality of the results

In addition, observation with check lists and field notes was used by the research team at each center in order to supplement the results obtained by analysis of data that were obtained from the above-mentioned samples.

1.3. Data Collection Tools

The types of data used for the study were both quantitative and qualitative. Accordingly, the instruments, which were used, for data gathering include in-depth interview, questionnaire, focus group discussion, field observation using checklist, data from documents.

Questionnaire was employed to collect data from school directors, preschool teachers, and assistant teachers. The questionnaire was developed based on the existing relevant review of literatures, knowledge and experience of the researchers. Furthermore, the questionnaire was translated from English to Amharic (official language)

before it was administered to principals, teachers and assistant teachers. The questionnaire was subjected to comments from different professionals in the area of education and language before dispatching.

The pilot survey was conducted in three none selected preschools to identify the vague and unnecessary items and omit irrelevances. In addition, the validity of instruments was tested by using Cronbach's alpha to measure the reliability of results.

In-depth interview was employed to gather data from region, zone and woreda level education sector heads, teaching learning and assessment core process owner and preschool experts. The interview was conducted based on the role of each of the participants in relation to implementing preschool program. In addition, focus group discussion was used to gather data from parents. The discussion focused on the roles of parents in sending their children to school, checking the change on students' progress and providing necessary supports for them. Observation was another very important tool that was employed in the data gathering process. The data from documentary sources such as preschool children's enrolment progress and attendance from year to year; expansion of preschool across the region; preschool policy documents and implementation guideline were collected by reviewing the secondary data sources.

Procedure of Data Collection

As the area to be covered by this research was very vast, the core researchers would not be able to collect data from all schools and centers. So, data collectors (enumerators) were recruited from different sampled woredas of the study areas. The selected enumerators were trained on how to administer the tools, collect reliable data and on how to keep the ethics of the research. The preschool focal persons at each woreda facilitated the process of data collection in their respective woredas. In addition, the core researchers also

observed the selected preschools and made personal observation of inside and outside classroom situations of the schools to triangulate the data collected by enumerators. The core researchers also conducted focus group discussions at selected preschools. Moreover, the core research team handled conducting interviews with Regional Education Bureau, Zonal Education Department and Woreda Education Office.

Methods of Data Analysis

In analyzing the data of the study, descriptive statistical analysis methods were used. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used for quantitative data analysis to determine frequency, percentages and mean and other results. In addition; qualitative data obtained through interview from preschool focal persons of selected woredas and zones and focus group discussion responses from PTA members were organized in to selected themes and then analyzed qualitatively and triangulated with quantitative results. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, diagrams, pie charts and graphs were employed to describe the general characteristics of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stakeholders Participation in Preschool Program

The involvement of stakeholders in preschool program is vital in that it impacts on the entire life and also enhances the learning of a child. Such participation of stakeholders is critical, not only in the very beginning of the educational process, but also throughout the child's entire life. In this regard, factors related to different stakeholders' participation on preschool program was discussed hereunder.

Parents Related Factors

Parental involvement has always been an essential component of every teacher-student-school academic endeavor. Parents, who have been considered as one of the stakeholders of the school community, play tremendous roles in the

child’s educational and environmental transformation; thus, the intensity or extent of participation that parents have in their children’s education and school, more often, have to be realized. This sub-section investigates parent related factors in the effectiveness of the program and their participation in preschool education program.

Education Level of Parents

The education level of parents has substantial role in the enrollment and level of academic success of their children starting from early childhood. The higher the parents’ educational level, the more chance students have to attend school at their appropriate age level. Moreover, the achievement of the children would be improved when the parents’ education level is increased because parents can support and work as tutor for their children at home.

Table 1: Education level of Parents as Perceived by Teachers and Principals

Rating Scale	Education level of parents as:	
	Responded by Teachers (%)	Responded by Principals (%)
Very low	30.9	27.9
Low	29	23.3
Medium	25.6	32.6
High	11.6	9.3
Very high	2.9	7

The result from the teachers’ response above shows that more than half of the research participants (59.9 %) replied that the education level of parents was low. Similarly, the response of principals in the same Table indicates that 51.2% of principals said that the nature of education level of parents was poor. The low level of parents' education can affect the overall readiness of preschool students to next level and the effectiveness of the preschool program.

The result from FGDs and interviews revealed that especially in rural areas low education level of parents was the major factor for low attendance and enrollment of the preschool children. Therefore, from these analyses, we can simply conclude that low education level of parents was one of the major factors that were affecting the effective implementation of preschool program in the study area.

Parental Follow Up Parental follow up can be taken as one of the major contributors for the children's educational achievement and proper

implementation of preschool program. Children are like young plants that require regular inspection and guidance of parents. In this regard, the responses of research participants were presented as follows.

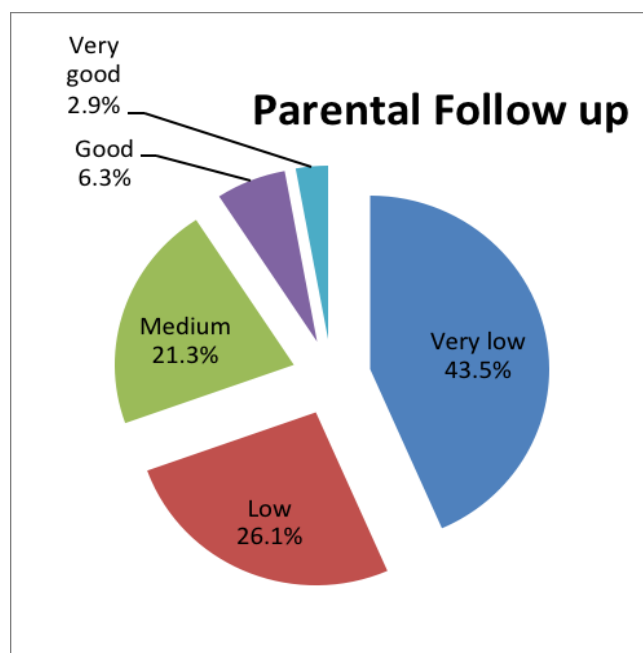


Figure-1: Response from teachers
Source: Computed from Primary Data

Parental follow up response of principal

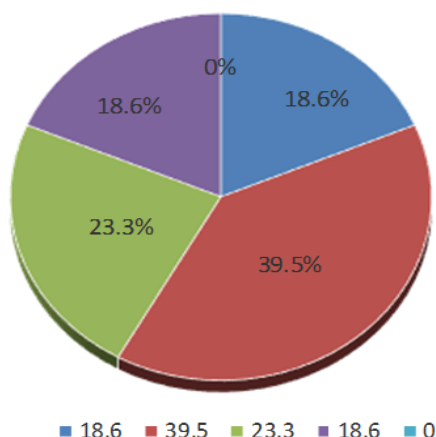


Figure 2: Response from Principals

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Figure 1 and 2 from above shows that 69.6% of teacher and 58.1% of principal respondents replied that the practice of parental follow up was low. The result from both interviews and focus group discussion also indicated that parental control and follow up was boldly sited as the major problem in supporting preschool children at home which can contribute for the actual teaching learning process at classroom level. Therefore, the result from qualitative and quantitative data analysis strongly indicated that the low parental follow up was the major problem in the study area.

Economic Status of Parents

Poor economic status of parents can hamper the participation and academic performance of preschool students. For instance, if parents cannot afford to provide enough food for the children, the hungry child cannot attend the class properly. In addition, if they fail to buy clothes for the children, the children hesitate to go to school with their torn-out clothes. This also affects the participation and achievement of preschool children. Table 2 below represents the percentage distribution of the nature of economic status of parents as replied by both teachers and principals.

Table 2: Economic Status of Parents

Rating Scale	Economic status as responded by	
	Teachers (%)	Principles (%)
Very low	30.4	23.3
Low	29.0	30.2
Medium	21.5	27.9
High	13.5	14
Very high	5.8	4.7

According to the result from above Table, 30.4% and 29.0 % of the teacher respondents reported that the economic status of the parents was very low and low respectively. Whereas only 12.1% and 2.4% have replied that the economic status of parents was high and very high respectively. The results from principals’ data analysis also show that 23.35% and 30.2% of principals reported that the economic status of the parents was very low and low respectively. Whereas only 14% and 1.4% of principals replied that the economic status of the parents was very low and low respectively. Hence, from results of both teachers and principals’ data analysis, it is possible to understand that the low economic status of the parents has affected the educational achievement and participation of preschool children

The results of the focus group discussion conducted with parents and community members, and interview with woreda preschool focal persons also coincide with the above result of quantitative analysis. In this regard, the majority of respondents in interview and focus group discussion reported that one of the major problems for students’ absenteeism, dropout, lack of learning facilities and low students’ achievement of preschool program was due to low parents’ economic status. The research team through field observation also realized that the low economic status of the parents was one of the determinant factors that affect the educational achievement and participation of preschool children.

Parental Participation in School Issues

This study also investigated the level of participation of parents in preschool related issues. Accordingly, Figure 2 below presents the level of participation of parents in preschool program.

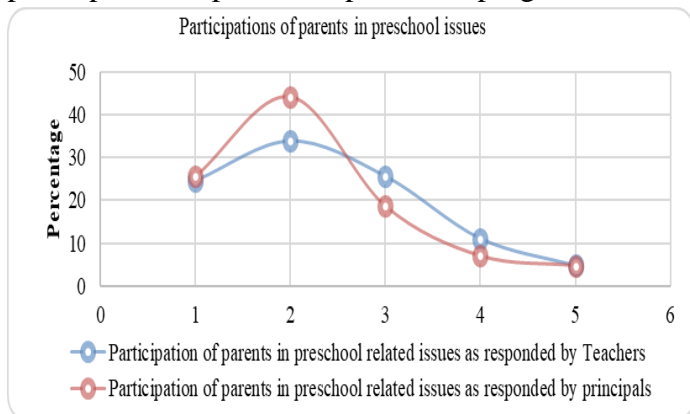


Figure 3: Participation of Parents in School Issues

From the above Figure, it is possible to see that 36.3% and 25.6% of the teacher respondents replied that the level of parental participation in preschool program was very low and low respectively. This accounts 69.6% in aggregate. Besides this, 26.5% and 47.6% of the principals' respondents replied that the level of parental participation in preschool program was very low and low respectively. From teachers and principals' data analyses, one can see that low parents' participation in preschool educational issues was the major problem for low performance and participation of the preschool children. Similarly, from interview, focus group discussion and field observation results it was also found that the participation of parents in school related issues was very low.

Perception of Community towards Preschool Teachers

The negative perception of community toward preschool teachers is among the factors which affect the effectiveness of preschool program. The following figure presents the perception of parents towards preschool teachers.

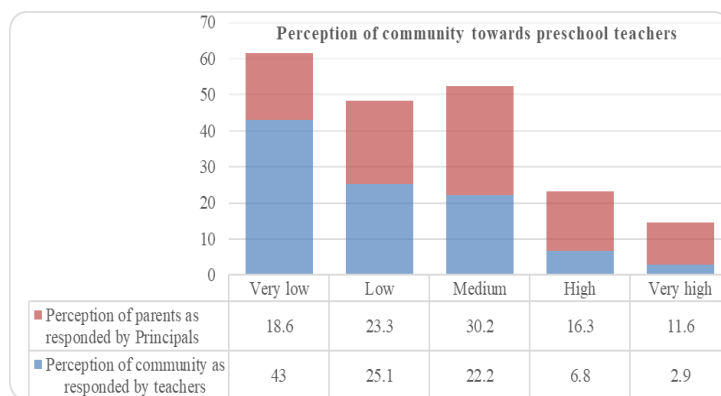


Figure 4: Perception of Community towards preschool

As it can be seen from the above Figure, 68.1% of teacher respondent revealed that the perception of the community towards preschool teachers was low. In addition to this, 41.9% of principal respondent revealed that the perception of the community towards preschool teachers was low. Although the response from principals shows that there was better perception of community towards preschool teachers, their response shows that only 27.9% of them reported that the perception of community towards preschool teacher was high. This indicates that perception of the community towards preschool teachers is one of the factors that negatively affected the effectiveness of preschool program. The result from FGDs and interview also revealed that the perception of the community on the status of preschool teachers was not good. There is usually a misconception that preschool teachers are less qualified and less paid; which results in underestimating the status of preschool teachers in the community. Due to this, competent candidates would not have interest to get employed in preschool.

Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) Follow Up of Preschool Program

It is not only the separate act of parents and teachers, which positively or negatively affect the effectiveness of the preschool program but also their joint action that highly contributes for the program. The following figure depicts the nature of parents to teacher association in preschool education.

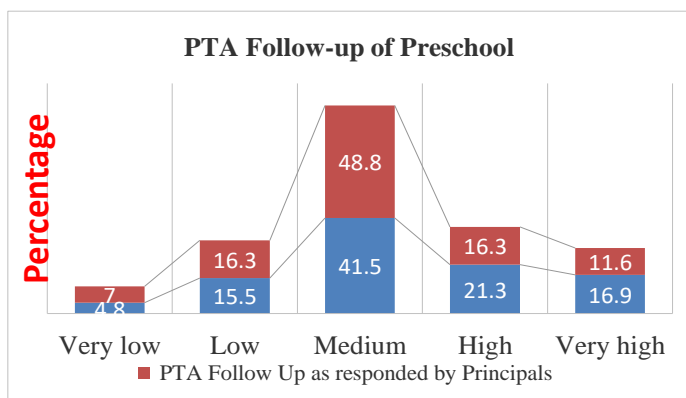


Figure 4: Parents-Teachers Association

As the Figure above depicts, 79.7 % of the teacher respondents reported that the follow up of Parents-Teacher Association (PTA) on preschool was at moderate level and above. In addition, as it is depicted in the same figure, 76.7% of the principal respondents replied that the follow up of Parents-Teacher Association (PTA) was at moderate and above. Hence, from the results of teachers' and principals' data analysis, it is possible to say that the PTA joint action cannot be taken as the major problem for the effective implementation of the preschool program.

However, the interview and focus group discussion conducted with Woreda preschool program focal persons and parents revealed that the low level of PTA joint action highly contributed for the sluggish progress of preschool effectiveness in the study area. The research team from their field observation also observed the problem related to Parents-Teacher Association as significant to affect the effectiveness of the program.

Student Related Factors

Late Coming of Students

The following Figure below shows the percentage distribution of level of late coming of preschool

students.

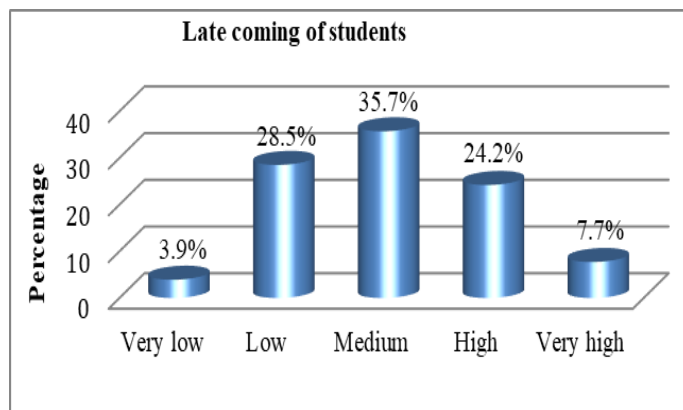


Figure 5: Late Coming of Students

Figure 5 above depicts that the considerable number of respondents (35.7 %) replied that the late coming of preschool students was medium and 28.5 % replied as low. This implies that late coming is not striking problem in most preschools. The interview, focus group discussion and field observation results also confirmed that the problem related to late coming of students was not serious.

Playing Habit of Students

Playing is the integral part of preschool teaching learning process. This research has tried to uncover the extent of playing habit of preschool students as instructional practices. The following table represents the percentage distribution of playing habit of preschool student as replied by both teachers and principals

Table 3: Playing Habit of Preschool Students

Rating Scale	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very low	13.0	13.0
Low	27.1	40.1
Medium	38.6	78.7
High	14.5	93.2
Very high	6.8	100.0

Table 3 above unveil that 13%, 27.1% and 38.6% of research participants replied that the playing habit of preschool students was very low, low and medium respectively. This tells us that the low

playing habit of preschool can be taken as one of the problems that affect the educational achievement of students in most preschools.

As the results from FGD from PTAs and other community members indicated, the playing habit of the preschool children was not promising. As interview and field observation results, the low level of students playing habit could be due to the low level of availability of playground, indoor and outdoor games and materials including low level of knowledge and skill of preschool teachers in motivating their students to play.

Age Related Factors

Preschool entry age of the students is one important factor that determines the achievements of the students and the effective implementation of preschool program. According to preschool education policy, the standard age to join preschool education program is 4-6 years (MOE, 2010) . The table below depicts the extent of below age and above age of preschool students.

Table 4: Results of Age-Related Factors

Rating Scale	Below Age Level		Above Age Level	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Very low	3	1.4	11	5.3
Low	73	35.3	62	30.0
Medium	74	35.7	78	37.7
High	41	19.8	36	17.4
Very high	16	7.7	20	9.7

The table above shows that 1.4%, 35.3% and 35.7 % of research participants reported that the extent of being below preschool age level was very low, low and medium respectively. Whereas 19.8% and 7.7% of the respondents reported that the extent of being below preschool age was high and very high respectively. This indicates that the extent of being below age level of preschool students was not the major problem of preschool program.

Of course, according to the research team observation and interview results, there is still certain level of age-related problem as it is depicted in the above table. The major problem

manifested in most schools was combining of different age group of preschool students in one class. As a result, children are obliged to learn the same content regardless of their age. As it can also be seen from the above table, the same is true for above preschool age problem; that is the extent of being above preschool age was not the major problem for the effectiveness of the program.

Therefore, the results from both qualitative and quantitative data analysis strongly indicated that the age level of preschool students was not the major challenge for implementation of preschool program in general and readiness of students in particular.

Students' Absenteeism

The regular attendance of preschool students has the significant role in their academic achievements. The Figure below demonstrates the

level of absenteeism of preschool students as responded by preschool teachers.\

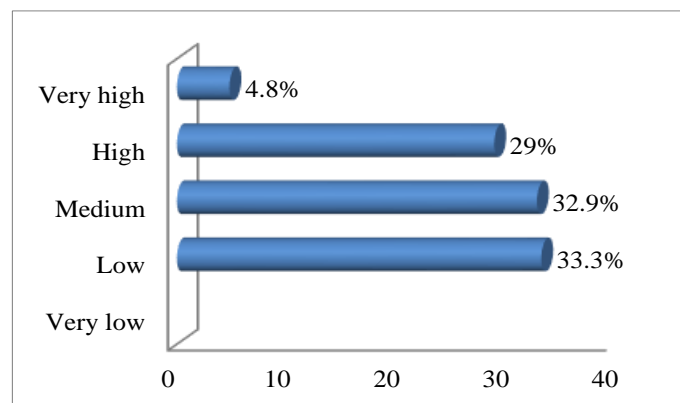


Figure 6: Preschool Students' Absenteeism

Accordingly, 4.8% and 29% of the respondents replied that the absenteeism of preschool students was very high and high respectively. Whereas 32.9% and 33.3% of the respondents replied that the absenteeism of preschool students was medium and low respectively. This tells us that the absenteeism of preschool students was one of the problems of the preschool program. The result from interview and observation also indicated that there was considerable absenteeism of students and it was one of the challenges especially in rural area preschools

Students Dropout

School dropout in general and preschool student’s dropout in particular affects the internal efficiency of educational program. In this regard, this sub part of the research tried to investigate the effects of preschool students drop out on effective

As Figure above indicated, 41.5% of the participants said that the students’ dropout rate was high while 27.1% of the respondents replied that the dropout rate of the students was low. This

indicates that the dropout rate of the students is substantial problem in the effectiveness of the program in the study area.

According to interview result, dropout is the manifestation of different push and pull factors such as teachers’ personality, motivation and qualification; poor quality of education provided; inadequate facilities; attractiveness of school environment; family background, particularly education level of parents, economic constraints (poverty); the livelihood of family; high opportunity cost of schooling children i.e. the parents may prefer using the labor of the children

Table 5: Response of Respondents on Community Support

S N	Community Support	Rating Scale in %									
		Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high	
		Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals
1	Material support	41.1	41.9	35.3	30.2	18.8	16.3	2.4	9.3	2.4	2.3
2	Budget support	72.0	37.3	14.0	14	8.2	27.9	3.4	16.3	1.4	4.7
3	Labor support	56.0	34.9	23.7	34.9	15.0	20.9	3.9	4.7	1.4	4.7

implementation of the program.

t hat they may lose when they send the children to school and so on. These factors were also pointed out by discussants of focus group discussion as the most challenging factors on the effectiveness of preschool education.

Community Support for the Program

The support from the community has a key role to implement the preschool education program effectively. The following table presents the level of supports as replied by teachers and principals.

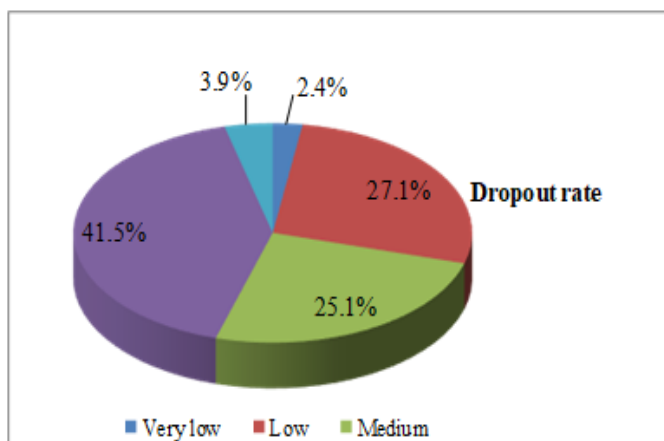


Figure 7: Dropout Rate of Preschool Students

As can be seen from Table 5 above, the support from the community for the preschool program was low. For instance, it is possible to see from the table that 76.4%, 86.0% and 79.7% of the teachers asserted that material, budget and labor support from the community were low respectively. In addition to this, 71.3%, 51.3% and 69.8% of principals also revealed that material, budget and labor supports from the community were low respectively. Hence, from the above results, it is possible to say that the poor support from the community can be taken as a major

material, financial and labor support that was manifested in quantitative analysis could be due to low awareness raising program conducted for the community on the importance of preschool programs.

The ECCE guideline of MoE (2010) [14] states that collaboration with community representative should be established for supporting the activities at preschool and the opportunity should be given to the community to provide input for running the preschool. The low community participation manifested in the results of the study could be due

Table 6: Support from Education Management level

SN	Community Support	Rating Scale in %									
		Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high	
		Teachers	Principals	Teacher	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals
1	Material support	59.4	20.9	17.4	30.2	14.0	37.2	7.0	4.7	1.9	7
2	Budget support	46.9	34.9	25.6	23.3	21.7	27.9	3.9	7.0	1.9	7.0
3	Labor support	56.0	30.2	20.8	11.6	15.0	34.9	7.2	9.3	1.0	14.0

problem of preschool program implementation and effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the focus group discussion and interview indicate that the communities are volunteer to do all things that they are requested to contribute for the effectiveness of the preschool program such as providing support in the form of labor, material and budget and willing to participate in any aspects in the program. The research team has also assured that the community have an interest to provide close follow up while their children are learning in the classroom, attending the meeting when the schools invite them to discuss on the issues of students learning and taking the children to and from the school to minimize the risk of accidents. However, the low

to the low opportunity provided by woreda education office and schools to involve the community on preschool issues.

Support from Different Education Management Levels

Support from Different Education Management Level plays a vital role for making the implementation of the program effective. The table below shows the response of teachers and principals towards the support from different management levels of education.

Table 6 above shows that the support from the Education Offices was low. For instance, it is possible to see from the table that 76.8%, 72.5% and 76.8% of the teacher respondents asserted that

material, budget and training support from the Education Offices were low respectively. In addition to this, 51.1%, 58.2% and 41.8% of principals replied that material, budget and technical support from Education Offices were low respectively. Hence, the result of teacher and principal respondents show that low material, budget and technical support from education offices and departments was a serious problem for effective implementation of preschool program in the study area.

However, regarding technical support, the result obtained from teacher and principal respondents was a little bit different i.e. 76.8% of teachers replied that the technical support from experts of education offices was low while only 41.8% of principals reported the support as low. This means that teachers reported technical support from education offices as major problem for the program effectiveness while perception of the principals towards technical support was not as such strong.

According to the results of interviews with preschool focal persons at woreda education offices, the technical support provided to preschools were establishing preschools at reasonable distances; recruiting and hiring preschool teachers and replacing other teachers if any of them resign; quarterly based supervision of the teaching-learning process and its administration; coordinating the program and providing material support.

However, some of them reported that their support was limited to supervision, follow up and establishing preschool at reasonable distance because there was no well-trained personnel, sufficient budget and facilities such as motor bikes. Moreover, as the research team observed, in most of the preschools there were no sufficient materials provided to the program. The further point is that preschool focal persons at woreda level did not have the necessary awareness of the

program including the technical knowledge and skill of the program and the policy documents such as Policy Framework, Strategic Operational Plan and Guideline of MoE and the Preschool Standard of REB. Hence, the study as general found out that technical support from different level of education sector is also limited affecting the effectiveness of the program implementation.

Supervision Related Factors

Proper and timely supervision is among the factors, which plays an important role in implementing the preschool program effectively. Preschool education supervision is the duty of woreda education office and cluster schools supervisors and primary school principals. The following figure represents the result of supervision related factors as responded by teachers and school principals.

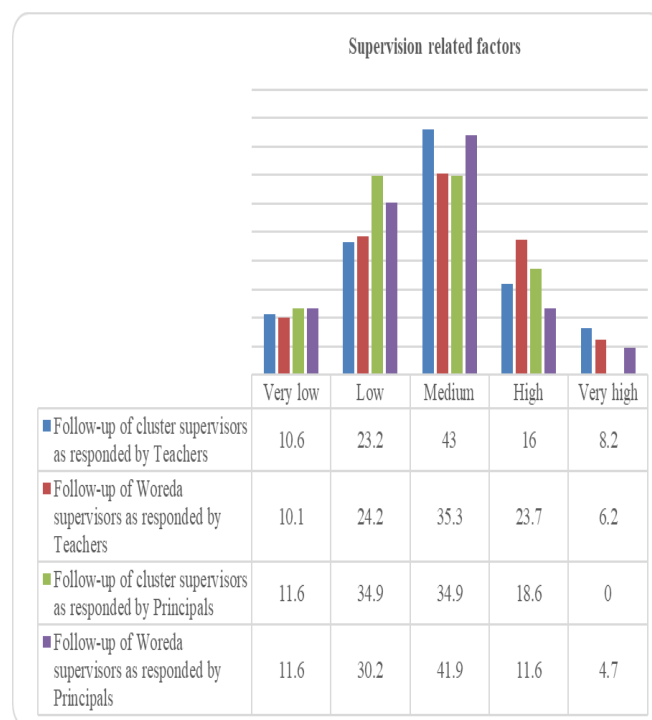


Figure 8: Supervision related factors

The result obtained from teacher and principal respondents about the follow up from woreda education office and cluster school supervisors indicated that the supervision provided was inadequate.

Hence, as it is shown in the above Figure, the problem with respect to supervision is considerable. As the responses of the interview

As depicted in Table 7 , the support from different NGOs in the study area was minimal. For instance, it is possible to see from the table

Table 7: NGOs Supports as replied by Teachers and Principals

Community Support	Rating Scale in %									
	Very low		Low		Medium		High		Very high	
	Response of									
	Teachers	Principal	Teacher	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teacher	Principals
1 Material support	86.0	67.4	3.4	9.3	6.8	11.6	1.9	4.7	1.9	7.0
2 Budget support	90.3	79.1	4.3	9.3	2.6	2.3	1.9	4.7	0.5	4.7
3 Labor support	91.8	66.6	1.9	10.3	3.4	11.6	2.4	9.3	0.5	2.3

conducted with woreda focal persons of the program, the main roles and responsibilities of them in implementing the preschool program focuses more on establishing preschools at reasonable distances; recruiting and hiring teachers rather than supervision. The program focal persons also raised that supervising and follow up was limited due to disproportional number of preschool personnel which does not correspond to large number of preschool centers existing in the woredas. They also explained that there was no separate structure for the program and no fully responsible personnel for preschool education program, which indicates that supervision related factor was one of the major problems for the effective implementation of the program.

Support from NGOs

It is believed that the support from different NGOs has positive impact on the effective implementation of preschool program. Table 7 below indicates the level of support by NGOs with respect to material, budget and training.

that 86.0%, 90.3% and 91.8% of the teacher respondents asserted that material, budget and training support from NGOs were very low respectively. Besides this, 67.4%, 79.1% and 66.6% of principal respondents replied that material, budget and training support from NGOs were very low respectively. The result from analysis of data from both teachers and principal respondents indicated that low support from NGOs was one of the challenging factors in of implementation of the preschool program in the study area. As the results from interview, FGDs and field observation reveal, there were some supports in limited areas of the study in terms of material, training and finance from different local and international NGOs. However, its coverage was very low.

Organization and Management of the Program

Organizational structure and management of the program play an important role for preschool education effectiveness. In order to be effective, preschool education needs some organizational arrangements and supportive system that facilitate smooth functioning of the preschool education program. Among them proper authority, clear roles and responsibilities definitions, clear work

relationship, staff size, professional support, resource for program/ administration, follow up and monitoring system and the like are important elements in organizational factors.

In this regard, the research team tried to collect data from REB, Zone Education Department and Woreda Education Offices preschool focal persons. Woreda preschool focal persons pointed out that their main roles and responsibilities in implementing the preschool program were: establishing preschools at reasonable distances; recruiting and hiring teachers; replacing other teachers when the teachers leave, supervising the teaching-learning process and its administration; coordinating the program and providing technical and material support. However, some of them reported that their support was limited to: supervising quarterly; follow up and establishing preschool at reasonable distance. In addition, the respondents replied that disproportional number of preschool experts which does not correspond to large number of preschool centers in woreda that created problem on continuous follow up and supervision. Parents and community members felt that preschool centers located outside primary schools are neglected and lost the attention of the government.

Although there was focal person who follow up preschool education program within Teaching, Learning and Assessment Core Process of each Woreda Education Office, there was no separate structure for the program and no fully responsible personnel for preschool education program. Moreover, lack of the budget for the program seriously affected effectiveness of the program. As respondents strongly expressed, absence of separate assigned budget and absence of trained and experienced preschool personnel were the major problems. In addition to this, as the research group observed and realized, Woredas Education Office in general and focal persons in particular did not have close supervision and support to the preschool education. Besides, the research team

identified in some woredas that the focal persons themselves did not have the necessary awareness of the program. The reasons for this could be inadequate training provided for the woreda personnel and the high turnover of them.

Zone preschool focal persons pointed out that the main roles and responsibilities of them in implementing the preschool education program were: coordinating and leading the teaching learning process in the schools; preparing plan and procuring the educational materials for the program; scaling up the best practices of the some schools which performed well; creating and developing awareness of the community and other stakeholders about the practice of preschool; providing adequate materials for preschool centers; translating teaching learning materials in to mother tongue language; visiting preschools quarterly for supervision and technical support; giving support for woreda education offices including provision of feedback and personnel to implement preschool education based on the standards. Moreover, Hawassa City Education Department in particular was providing materials such as seats and tables to those schools that could not afford the cost of the materials; selecting and assigning the best female teachers; providing training for some preschool teachers; disseminating model preschool materials like blackboard; story books and others to the learning centers.

Regional Education Bureau Teaching, Learning and Assessment Core Process owner and experts pointed out that the main roles and responsibilities of the region in implementing the preschool education program were: incorporating preschool education program in Regional Annual Plan; building structures to implement preschool program well; giving training for different stakeholders; follow up the recruitment of trained preschool teachers; giving technical support to primary schools to implement the program in the same compound with isolated fence and different centers; scaling up the best practices of some

woredas which performed well; creating and developing awareness of the zonal and woreda experts and other stakeholders about the practice of preschool; providing adequate materials for Zones and Woredas; preparing standards and curriculum frameworks, implementation guidelines and teaching learning materials.

However, some of the challenges raised by the Regional Education Bureau were lack of budget support from the government side; lack of sectorial integration to effective implementation of the program; lack of qualified teachers; lack of well-organized structures, lack of emphasis given for special needs preschool education children and lack of facilities for the program. These problems highly affected the preschool implementation at the grassroots level. Moreover, the preschool program was not being implemented in line with the standard set by the region. This indicates that the low attention given to the preschool program affected its effectiveness and contributed to low enrollment and achievement of the preschool children.

Stakeholders Related Challenges of the program

- Inadequate support from different level of Education Sector
- Low parental awareness on preschool education
- Lack of parents follow up and support after sending children to school
- Low economic status of parents to provide the necessary clothing and educational materials to their children
- Low community attention towards preschool program
- Absence of collaboration among different concerned government organizations such as Education, Health, Agriculture, Women and Children Affairs, and others.
- Negative perception of the community towards preschool teachers

Conclusion

The results from stakeholders' participation strongly indicated that the supports from community, different education levels and none governmental organizations was limited and can be taken as a major problem for students' academic achievements and effective implementation of the program. Hence, we concluded that there is inadequate participation and cooperation of stakeholders for better success of the program. However, as the research team identified through focus group discussion, the parents and the community had the willingness to contribute whatever they are requested for the improvement of the preschools. In this regard the problem lies on less awareness raising programs conducted by the concerned bodies.

As quantitative result of the study indicated, parents related issues such as parental follow up of the students, economic status of parents, education level of parents and parental participation in student and school issues were at low level. Moreover, the qualitative results from interviews, focus group discussion and field observation by research team also revealed that parents related factors were boldly sited as the decisive challenge for effectiveness of the program implementation. Hence, the study made us to conclude that, one of the major area of gap responsible for low participation of the students and their less academic achievement and their readiness was parents related issues such as low parental follow up of the students, low economic status of parents, low education level of parents and low parental participation in student and school issues.

According to the results from student related factors, high dropout rate and absenteeism were the serious problem in implementation of the program. In addition, the playing habit of preschool students was at low level. Even though these factors are related to preschool students, the research team infers that, the problem stems from the low existence of indoor and outdoor games

and materials, non-conductive school environment, problems related to parents and teachers that diminish the interest of students learning.

The support and follow up of REB, Zonal Education Departments and Woreda Education Offices was limited. In addition, there was no separate structure and fully responsible personnel for the program. Moreover, there was also lack of the budget for the program. Therefore, we concluded that the absence of adequate support; lack of allocated budget; low awareness of focal persons on the program; absence of separate structure and personnel for the program were the major problems for the effective implementation of the program.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions the following recommendations are drawn:

- ❖ The supports from community, different education levels and non-governmental organizations for preschool program were limited. Therefore, the different level of education sector should due attention for the improvement of the program and raise the awareness and mobilize different stakeholders for the success of the program.
- ❖ Parental follow up of the students, economic status of parents, education level of parents and parental participation in student and school issues were at low level which affected the effectiveness of preschool program. Therefore, all concerned bodies should work hard on awareness raising programs for the parents on the importance of their follow up of their children's performance, participation in the students' and school issues. Moreover, in order to improve parents' education level a due attention should be given to Integrated Functional Adult Education.
- ❖ High dropout rate and absenteeism were the serious problem in implementation of the program. In addition, the playing habit of preschool students was at low level. These

problems stem from the low existence of indoor and outdoor games and materials, non-conductive school environment, problems related to parents and teachers, which diminish the interest of students learning. Therefore, the great emphasis should be given to ensure the availability of indoor and outdoor games and materials; creating the conducive school environment and improving parents and teachers related problems.

- ❖ The study revealed that the support and follow up provided from different level of education sector for the program was not promising. Therefore, The REB, Zonal Education Departments and Woreda Education Offices should provide adequate support and continuous follow up to improve the implementation of the program. Special attention should be given for the preschool centers outside primary schools.
- ❖ There was no separate structure and fully responsible personnel for preschool education program from REB to WEO level which resulted in less responsibility and accountability of assigned personnel. Therefore, there should be separate structure from REB to woreda level and fully responsible personnel for the program to make the program successful.
- ❖ The result also indicated that there was absence of separate assigned budget and close supervision, and support to the preschool education. Moreover, the focal persons themselves at woreda level did not have the necessary awareness of the program. Therefore, adequate budget should be allocated and continuous supervision and support should be provided for the program. In addition, the awareness of focal persons at woreda level on the program should be raised through continuous training.

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