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Practices and Challenges of Students' Assessment in ECCE

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Abstract

This study examined the practices and challenges of students' assessment in ECCE in government primary schools (specifically "O"-class teachers) in Dehana Woreda, Ethiopia. To achieve the purposes, qualitative research approach with case study design was used. The researcher purposively selected five (5) clusters from a total of 13 and five (5) government primary schools from a total of 15 in the Woreda. From those sample schools, five (5) teachers from a total of 10 "O"-class teachers and five principals from a total of eight (8) primary school principals were selected purposively. Semi-structured interviews were used as tools of data collection. Besides, the researcher used document and observation checklist to collect data to triangulate and complement the data collected through interview. The collected data were analyzed thematically using direct quotation, narration, paraphrasing and interpretive analysis techniques. The results revealed that though teachers and principals have the knowhow of the concepts of assessment, they lack the knowledge of purposes of assessment, principles of assessment and multiple methods and areas of assessment. Concerning their assessment practices, they mainly assess children's learning progress in every fifteen (15) days at a regular session through tests and observation. Hence, the practices related to ECCE assessment were limited. Finally, it is recommended that, government offices, colleges and universities shall work to create awareness and give training to "O" class teachers and principals to improve their knowhow and practice of children's learning assessment.

Keywords: Assessment, ECCE, Children's learning, "O" class

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Introduction

Background

The concept of Early Childhood Education depends on different views, in terms of child's life and in school terms. In terms of child's life early childhood education is considered as the period from birth to eight years of age. In school terms early childhood education is a special branch of education serving with children from infancy to commencing regular school. Early childhood education increased tremendously all over the world within the last twenty years. This situation is complementary with research results based on long term effects of early education to later life (Grote & Burton, 2008).

New approaches of early childhood learning were started since the 18th century in Europe. The first infant school was opened in German by Prince Pauline in 1802 (Rusk, 1993) as cited in Tsegaye (2014). The crossing of early childhood education from Europe to the rest of the world periodically spread and resulted in the opening of kindergartens to different countries in the next consecutive years. Froebel (1782-1852) was the father of kindergarten and opened the first kindergarten in German 1839.

Nowadays ECCE has become an area of concern everywhere. It is widely declared in various international documents and developmental goals. Such as UN convention on the right of the child, African charter on the rights and welfare of the child, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals and others. Therefore, all governments are encouraged to work fulfilling the rights of the child through comprehensive policies, laws, programs, practices, professional training and researches (UNICEF, 2008). But for the past many years children in their early childhood had been that of invisible human beings with their educational settings. Hidden behind the education family and disconnected from the recognition of their older siblings.

The government of Ethiopia is among the member states that ratified the international documents, goals, and has made to come up with various interventions which are geared towards providing quality ECCE for Ethiopian children. In the earlier period pre-primary school education in Ethiopia was basically given by elder brothers or sisters and faith based institutions namely Orthodox Church "Abinattimhirt", Mosque "mederessa", and missionaries for the sake of maintaining the moral values and serving the religious purpose. In Ethiopia the first modern kindergarten was established by French railway workers in 1908 at Dire Dawa. Later in 1963 the community service based kindergartens were established RasDestasefer (A.A), Debrezeit, Debrebirhan, Hawasa and Asmara by the government of Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2008).

Recently as a positive response to the international call and due to the overall changes in the national educational priorities, Ethiopia has given due emphasis to ECCE in the Education and Training Policy specifically in the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP) III and IV (MOE, 2010). The statement quoted from ESDP IV clearly indicates this concern:

ECCE have known an important expansion under ESDP III and ESDP IV. The government gave attention to the expansion of access to ECCE. [Because] participating in ECCE helps the young child prepare for the formal school and succeed in the early grades (MOE, 2010:30).

In doing so, Ethiopia has tried to enhance the quality, accessibility and equitability of services for children through creating more efficient partnerships and capacity building programs stakeholders both in urban and rural areas. The policy framework anticipates preschool classes in government owned primary schools. In this regard Ethiopia tried to realizing the pillars and priority areas of the ECCE policy framework.

According to Amhara National Regional State Education Bureau ANRSEB (2016) training manual, in Ethiopia the ECCE program is given in the form of KG, O-class, accelerated school readiness (ASR) and child-to-child approaches. But now a day's child-to-child modality is phase out. Kindergarten (KG) is the 1st approach of ECCE having four levels (nursery, KG1, KG2 and KG3) and mostly practiced in urban and private schools. O-class is an approach of ECCE that 40 weeks (one year) school readiness

program for 6 years old children attained that prepares a resource package based on the existing O-class syllabus consisting of different activities and mostly practiced in both urban and rural government schools.

Accelerated school readiness (ASR) is an approach that gives for eight weeks (150 hours) to accelerate child readiness to school for 6 years old children. This approach will be available to all children who did not attend O-class or any types of school readiness before entering grade one between July and August.

So, to push ECCE forward in a quality, accessibility and equitability of services knowing the concepts, purposes, principles and tools of assessment is vital. Assessment is the way of collecting information about children's development, learning, health, behavior, academic progress, need for special services, and attainment. Early childhood assessment is the course of observing, recording and documenting the work children do, and how they do it. An appropriate assessment of ECCE may include the following purpose; screening, instruction, diagnostic, special supports and program evaluation (Gullo, 2006).

According to Gullo (2006), assessments in ECCE have the following guiding principles. Bring about benefits for children, tailored to a specific purpose, reliable, valid and fair for that purpose, policies designed recognizing the reliability and validity of assessments, age-appropriate in both content and the method of data collection, linguistically appropriate and parents should be a valued source of assessment information as well as an audience for assessment results.

In sub-Saharan Africa the current ECCE assessment practices ensure the development of each of these skills is important in any attempt to contribute solution to the problem of quality in basic education. Assessment is the bedrock of an effective teaching and learning environment. Regular, reliable and timely assessment is a key to improving learning and enhancing quality of education. It allows those working in the education system to diagnose, monitor and assure the quality of education. This situation in which teachers do not practice assessment to the extent themselves deem necessary for the enhancement of quality of education is partly attributable to their lack of training on and understanding of the use of formative nature of classroom assessment as an effective means of achieving everyday lesson objectives (UNESCO, 2005).

Based on the Ethiopian strategic operational plan and guidelines for ECCE frame work (2010, p. 60) states that:

assessment of ECCE should be holistic, focusing on all aspects of their development, continuous, using appropriate methods, and achievement tests should not be used as a basis for promotion, retention or selection, assessment results must be appropriately communicated to parents and must not be used to label the child, assessments should indicate the child's strengths and weaknesses as well as make recommendations for improvement.

In sum, assessment in ECCE is classified in different ways based on different conditions: based on time; formative and summative assessment, based on the purpose of assessment; informal and formal assessment. Most of the time in the ECCE program formative and informal assessment is recommended. Preprimary schools need to pay more attention to teacher's understanding and practice about children's learning assessments of ECCE programs, specifically child's learning assessment in O-class is important for early identification and support, to develop self-concept and vital for the next life of the child to succeed their goals. To do so effectively, assessment is pertinent. The conceptual framework of this study is based on the practice of Gullo's (2006), six principles of ECCE assessment.

The inspiration for this study arises from dealing with O-class teachers practice and challenges of their students' assessment. This is because mostly O-class teachers have misunderstanding and misuse of purposes, principles, tools and methods of assessment. Therefore, the present study is designed to examine the practices and challenges of students' assessment in ECCE at government primary schools, specifically in O-class teachers at Dehana woreda administration.

Statement of the Problem

Assessment is a complex process that is influenced by a number of challenges. Such as; institutional related challenges (designing of assessment instrument, ECCE curriculum, child size or child teacher ratios, training and salary of teachers), teacher related challenges (misunderstanding of child's developmental perspective, child's developmental characteristics, characteristics of learning environment (Wortham, 2008).

According to Gullo (2006), to make assessment effective, credible and realistic assessment purpose, principles and tools need to be considered and implemented properly. Each assessment practices serves as a purpose, multiple and ongoing. ECCE teachers should have skills and understandings for the essentials of assessment as well as acknowledge the importance of parents and family involvement. Assessment of children is different from the assessment of adults. The difference is in the way of children's learning. Assessment is one of the complex aspects of teacher-classroom interactions. It is a course of collecting evidence from students by teachers for the purpose of making decisions about students' knowledge and skills, to guide instructional activities, to give special support, to diagnose child problem and control the activity of the child. Different world wide researches are conducted by different researchers regarding children's assessment in ECCE. For instance, Sayed (2009) study concerned on students and teachers' perception of assessment practice in higher education revealed that both students and teachers demonstrated an awareness of the importance of assessment in relation to students learning and implementing various forms and approaches of classroom assessment is a potential at the institution level.

Acar and Yildizli (2018) study conducted on teacher's classroom assessment practices in primary, secondary and high school students in Turkey shows that more than half of the teachers performed assessments to provide feedback to the students, to increase learning, to determine the level of achievement and to monitor the progress of the students.

A research conducted by Solomon (2014) on teachers' practices and challenges of implementing continuous assessment in government first cycle primary schools depicts that very weak document handling, poor record keeping of learners' continuous assessment achievement and less learners' involvement in their own assessment.

According to the evaluation reports of ESDP IV (MOE,2014), in Ethiopia O-class teachers face diverse problems in curriculum implementation. Lack of physical facilities, difficulty in evaluation practice, lesson planning and organizing child activities, teaching-learning process, socio- environment problem, stating instructional goals, objectives, contents, lack of administrative support, problems related to parental involvement and ineffectiveness of assessments are challenges of O-class teachers. Different research reveals that a number of teachers had little knowledge for develop, use and practice of age appropriate areas of learning assessment (MOE, 2014).

According to Esubalew (2018), Study on teachers' knowledge and practice in assessment of children's learning and development in private schools at Bahir Dar city administration, reveals that teachers have understanding on the nature of assessment, lack concepts of higher order purposes of assessment, lacks using multiple methods of assessment and areas of assessment.

Even though the above different researches are studied in the area of assessment, most of the above studies do not touch directly my concern i.e., 'the practices and challenges of students' assessment in ECCE' specifically O-class teachers. Moreover, the aforementioned studies are conducted on government primary, secondary and higher institution levels but the present study is conducted on government pre-primary schools. This is the gap identified by the researcher.

The problem that the researcher wanted to study is the practice and challenges of student's assessment in ECCE, specifically in O-class teachers. This is because the problem O-class teacher's misuse of assessment is deep rooted and not follows the right purpose, principles and tools of assessment that we educational experts supervise and check their assessment practice in observation. Their assessment is

simply for the purpose of grading. Without solving this problem, thinking quality ECCE program in the selected woreda is difficult. So, the desire of the researcher to conduct this study is that O-class teachers should use the appropriate child assessment techniques, the recommended purpose, basic principles and tools of child assessment.

So, my intention is to conduct the research on 'an examination of practices and challenges of students' assessment in ECCE' specifically in O-class teachers to assessing the practice; in terms of understanding students assessment, perception of students assessment, purpose and extents to implement principles of students assessment and challenges that influence practice of assessment to add something new to the existing literature. Thus the following research questions were raised to be answered through the course of the research process.

Research Questions

1. How do "O-class" teachers explain student assessment?
2. How do "O-class" teachers perceive the purpose of student assessment?
3. How do "O-class" teachers implement principles of student assessment?
4. How do "O-class" teachers assess their student?
5. What challenges do "O-class" teachers face in practicing students' assessment?

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter deals with the research methodology of the study which includes research design, data source, sample and sampling techniques, data gathering instruments and method of data analysis.

Research Design

Qualitative research approach with case study research design is appropriate for this study. Because the researcher develops a description of an individual or group setting, analyzing data for themes or categories and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions. With this concern in mind, the qualitative data consisted of verbatim quotations from ECCE teachers and principals about their experiences, opinions, feelings, understandings, perceptions, extents and challenges about assessment that were obtained through interviews (semi-structured), observations of activities and extracted from documents.

The research design that the researcher used was case study. This design was preferred as it allows the researcher to probe in-depth processes rather than outcomes. It provide detailed examination of the social being studied and the researcher can pay attention to the context and consider a range of events. The case study research design is adaptive as questions can be changed as the case develops and providing a much richer explanation of the phenomenon under study.

Population, sample size and sampling technique

Population

The target populations of the study was government primary school teachers and principals specifically O-class teachers and primary school principals worked at Dehana Woreda administration. This is because at the selected Woreda ECCE is given linking within the government primary schools in the form of O-class modality. Thus, the target population of the study was O-class teachers and primary school principals who work under Dehana Woreda education office.

Sample Size

For the purpose of this study, the researcher purposively selected five clusters and five schools (one school for each cluster) from a total of 13 clusters and 15 primary schools. All clusters have primary schools and each primary school have O-classes. The researcher also selected five O-class teachers from a total of 10 O-class teachers and five principals from a total of eight (8) principals to get far richer information about the practices and challenges of ECCE assessment.

Sampling Techniques

Non probability sampling i.e. Purposive sampling technique is preferable to select good key informants of school principals and teachers (Creswell, 2013). Purposively the researcher selected five clusters and five schools. Among the five purposively selected primary schools, the researcher selected five O-class teachers and five principals. Moreover, the researcher selected more experienced O-class teachers and vice principals purposively.

Data Collection Instruments

In order to get the relevant information, the researcher used both primary and secondary data sources. From Primary sources interview (semi-structured) and observation were employed. A document analysis was used as a secondary data sources, like mark list, port folio, behavior record books, o-class text books and discussion with parents.

Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interview is the most common type of interview used in qualitative social research. In semi-structured interview the content but not the form of the questions is predetermined. In this type of interview the same questions need to be asked in each interview and the researcher produces an interview schedule. Hence, the researcher plays more active role when interviewing the participants explicit verbal cues to the stimulus and activates a concrete report of responses by key informants. Semi-structured interview guide was conducted with teachers and principals for two sets that focused on both the practice and challenges of assessment interims of understanding, perception, purpose, principles and tools. Eight (8) semi-structured interview guide items were employed to gather the required data.

Observation

The researcher prepared observation checklist to observe the practical situations during the instruction is takes place for five days in each O-class. This is because observational data gathering systems are attractive as that afford the researcher has the opportunity to gather live data from live situations (Patton, 2002).

Document Review

Document review is a secondary source of data used to check the activity that is takes place in the proper way. Based on this idea, the researcher reviewed important documents such as; student's portfolio, file folder, anecdotal records and the result includes the children's different work, continuous assessment result, their sanitation, behavior record book, grades, discussion with parents. In addition, the researcher reviewed documents like ECCE frame work, guide line and standards, O-class text books, and how they are fit together.

Techniques of Data Analysis

Analyzing the data and figuring out how to represent the qualitative data consists preparing and organizing the data for analysis, grouping codes and organizing themes, interpreting the data and

representing it (Creswell, 2013). Based on this idea, the researcher placed the data into categories, subcategories and finally organized them into themes. The themes that were created were based on codes that consisted phrases, expressions and ideas articulated by participants of the study. The data analysis method the researcher used in this research was thematic data analysis which includes paraphrasing, direct quotes and narrations.

Ethical Consideration

Ethics is one of the most crucial areas of the research. In the research there should be strong positive interaction between the researcher and the sample participants. The other ethical considerations considering the ethics of research participants are not optional rather it is statutory and mandatory. Hence, most ethical considerations outlined in the APA (1997) should be strictly observed while collecting and analyzing data and reporting the results as well. First of all the researcher has got permission from the Woreda education office and primary schools where the study was takes place. The willingness of sample teachers and principals was assured and reached consensus through discussion by mentioning the advantage of the study for educational office, the school teachers, students and parents.

Results and Discussions

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected and discussion of results against related previous studies and data were collected from O-class teachers and principals using semi-structured interview on the purpose of examination of practices and challenges of students' assessment in ECCE and discussion of the research results was presented.

Results

Participants' Understanding on ECCE Assessment

The participants (teachers and principals) of this study were asked about their understanding of assessment of children's learning. The participants perceived assessment of children's learning as: a day to day activity through which teachers follow children's progress in their overall activity. It is described as a process that helps teachers to know whether the child knows the desired contents to their level or not. Besides, children's learning assessment also understood as a means to register children's educational progress. Some participants of the research explained on understanding of assessment of children learning:

It is a process of gathering information about children's current level of understanding about the information that we provide to them in the teaching learning process as well as in the external play activities and the process by which we teachers used it in order to follow up students' progress in line with the intended educational objectives, physical skills and their age levels. In doing so, assessment plays a significant role for constructive feedback for the learning progress and change of students in each lesson and a means in which we try to trace children's learning style, behavioral issue, inter personal relationship and psychomotor skills. In line with this expression, assessment is a process that we follow children's feeding way and sanitation (Participant 2, 3, 8, and 9)

Besides, Participants 5 and 10 explained assessment as:

It is a very vital tool to gather information about our students' background and show the current performance of students while they are attending here at the school. They further noted that assessment really provides an insight on how to scaffold and teach students as it serves as a mirror of our student's needs and performances and a process of gathering information about children's current level of understanding about the information that we provide to them in the teaching learning process as well as in the external play activities.

Generally, the participants of this study (teachers and principals) explained: assessment as a means and tools used to gather information about their students. This in turn helps them to identify individual differences on learning styles and performance which further initiates them to search for strategies to diagnose the observed gap of their learners for the maximum satisfaction and achievements of learners.

Purpose of Assessment of Children's learning

Participants were requested to explain the purpose of their students' assessment. Accordingly, they reported the purposes of assessment as follows:

To achieve the objectives of the lesson:

Almost all participants reflect that assessment is conducted to meet the stated educational objectives relevant for learners. This is best elaborated in the excerpt of participants as: educational objectives are frameworks that direct the teaching learning process towards it. Hence, our assessment is mainly aimed at measuring the achievements of the intended learning objectives that we have outlined in each lesson (Participant 4, and 9).

To check children's progress:

While teaching students for any educational program sets desirable changes to be observed on the sides of students. Hence, the participants of this study assert that we used assessments to measure the progress of each learner in each lesson.

To support learning

Some participants also reported that assessment provides hints to identify the real gaps of their learners and identifying the gaps for taking intervention strategies to shape the students learning towards the desired one.

To give certification:

The other purpose of assessment that the participants are describe to give approval for the Childs. In doing so, most participants revealed that they used assessment to give certification for their students that have fulfill the standard of pre-primary and ready for latter schooling. More specifically, some of the descriptions in this regard from the response of participants are:

It is used to please parents and to present children's result in parent's conference as well as to improve children's self confidence by inviting them to talk, to move and to express their idea freely and used as grading that is teachers used to confirm what students know and perform at the level were passes and not know and can't perform is fail. (Participant 3 and 10)

Generally, the participants of this study stated that fragmented ideas on the purpose of ECCE assessments and those ideas are concentrated and indicated the purpose to give certification as grading aim.

Role of Teachers in Assessing Children

The participants of the research were asked their role as teachers in assessing children for the practice of children's learning. The participants said that the following activities are their roles. Assisting and know learners' day-to-day learning and teaching, providing feedback to parents and staffs, follow children's ways of feeding, sanitation, health condition, communicates with parents and Parents participate in course of assessing in giving information about children even though, their role in assessment of children's learning is too limited (Participant 4, and 10).

Generally, the participant of this study states that the recommended role of teachers in assessment practice. But in the study area the role of teachers in assessing children are not consistent. It differs from teacher to teacher and place to place.

Principles of Assessment and Implementation

The teachers and principals were interviewed to reflect on principles of assessment. All of them don't know the principles of assessment. They reported the purpose of assessment which is not the principles of assessment. For instance, two participants explained the following as principles of assessment.

Used as to improve children self confidence by inviting them to talk, to move and to express their idea freely and used as grading that is teachers used to confirm what students know and perform at the level passes and not know and can't perform fail.(Participant 3, and 8)

So, it is difficult to say that the principals and "O" class teachers know the principles of assessment as expected.

Tools and methods of Assessment

The teachers were interviewed to reflect on what assessment tools and methods they use for assessing children's learning. They reflect the following tools and methods of assessment.

Test

Most of the respondents of this study said that, they assess children's learning through test. In order to measure the level of students' understanding on a certain lesson given in the teaching learning process teachers have used oral demonstration and paper-pencil-tests. According to the information obtained from the participants, teachers measure their students' performance through techniques like:

Oral question: Teachers use words to be recalled after they said. Students were asked to recall their sense organs, letters, the names of their family members, directions (right, left, back and front), different wild and domestic animals, personal hygiene, environmental hygiene and indoor equipments orally. Besides, students were tested through reading ability through reading words and sentences. Participants 1 and 6 strongly reflect that:oral question is the most significant way to measure our students' linguistic ability and students should be carefully cultivated and measured through oral to increase their speech and confidence .

Demonstration: In addition to oral questions, students were asked to show mathematical symbols, letters, tables, chairs, pictures and body parts. They replied that weuse demonstration as means to measure our students' level of understanding and we got this tool as a crucial tool to measure students' knowledge of terminology together with the objects under demonstration (Participant 3 and 6).

Paper-pencil-tests: in order to measure students' writing skill teachers used paper-pencil- tests. Teachers reported that they measure students to construct words by giving letters and to be reported in written form. Students also asked to draw some pictures of their own interests. Besides, simple true false and minor completion items were used. They reflected that after students have possessed identification of letters, numbers and some concept, students' performance ismeasured through paper pencil tests. For example, students are required to match pictures with their respective names (Participant 2 and 9).

Observation

The other tools and methods that teachers reflect as assessment tool for children's learning is observation. The participants of the research reported that by using observation they assess children's learning progress; like participation, their way of handling pen, play and speech. Socio emotional development: The respondents said that, they assess children's socio emotional development by observation. As respondents reported, they assess children's social development during children's interaction with their classmate children's, outside classmates and with their teachers. The observation includes their way of talking, greeting, participation in class room, cooperation in different activities. Generally, the participant of this study stated that for the question what assessment tools and methods

currently teachers are used? Except paper and pencil tests, the others explained by the participants are recommended tools and methods of ECCE assessment. But paper and pencil tests are not recommended for children's like o-classes. This is because paper and pencil test needs high understanding and strong muscles. Besides, the researcher observe using observational checklist, teachers understand and identify the various stages of child learning assessment for documenting child's developmental growth across different age groups.

Time and place of Students' Assessment

The teachers were asked about when and where their assessment practices was carried out for the required purposes. Based on this, the participants stated that: They assess children's learning more specifically their learning (cognitive development) in every fifteen days. Because, starting from the month up to the middle (fifteen days) is mainly time of teaching learning. On the other hand, Participant 2 and 8 said that: we assess children's sanitation weekly through observation.

With regard to the place, all respondents assess children's in class room settings. Regarding to their physical activity they assess outside the classroom. Moreover, students' physical development and socio emotional is also conducted at outdoor activities while they are interacting and playing with their peers.

Documentation Practice of Teachers

The respondents reported that teachers have documented what they assessed about children's learning by using the following documentation techniques. Mostly all learning results are well documented in administrative office through file folder, Portfolio, anecdotal records and the result includes the children's different work, continuous assessment result, their sanitation, behavior record book, grades, discussion with parents etc.

As teachers reported that they have documented all the assessment results which include both learning and developmental areas, the researcher through document analysis assured that teachers documented the cognitive/learning/ assessment results and socio-emotional, physical, dressing style, sanitation, health status, physical maturity are documented in separate files.

Generally, as participants told, teachers and parents of children's interact to discuss about children over all activity depending on this document more specifically at the end of each semester, even though the participation of parents are limited.

Challenges of ECCE Assessment

The participants of this paper were asked to reflect on the challenges they have faced in the assessment process of children learning is participants identify the following challenges that faced when they assess children's learning:

Low participation and follow up of parents: in helping teachers during assessment of children's learning the participation and follow up of child's parent are very low.

Under age children: there are some under age children that create difficulty to assess them according to the standards of that level.

Presence of children with some special needs: As the participants said, there is no professional teacher for those special need children's and it is difficult to assess their learning and development effectively, difficult to understand and time consuming to assess.

Teachers' lack of assessment skills: Most teachers are not trained to teach and treat children in O-class level students. Besides, special training on how to assess children in O-class level students is not as such accessible for teachers. Due to this, their skills to practice assessment are limited.

Inappropriate ECCE curriculum: participants of the study reported that a well-balanced curriculum should support the development of all children socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually. The curriculum should be designed for active involvement by children in the learning process, recognizing that children learn through play, active manipulation of the environment, concrete experiences and communicating with peers and adults. In addition, ECCE curriculum is age appropriate, research based and considers the development of the whole child. The curriculum should include language/literacy, mathematics, science and social studies, social and emotional skills, health and physical development. Most importantly ECCE curricula should be fun and engaging with educational materials. In line with this, O-class teachers are not fit to implement the curriculum. Hence, most participants of the research are not qualified and trained. So, teachers are not interpreted the ECCE curriculum.

Class sizes/child-teacher-ratios: in Ethiopia the recommended child-teacher-ratio is 30(thirty) up to forty children per class but in the study area there is a high child- teacher-ratio that reaches seventy (70) children per class.

Discussions

The main purpose of this paper was to examine the practices and challenges of students' assessment in ECCE in selected government primary schools. To accomplish this purpose qualitative data was collected and analyzed accordingly. The discussions of results are concerning with the research questions and their findings.

Concerning with this: teachers and principals knowledge for the explanations of assessment was good. They explained: assessment is a means and tools used to gather information about their students. This in turn helps them to identify individual differences on learning styles and performance which further initiates them to search for strategies to diagnose the observed gap of their learners for the maximum satisfaction and achievements of learners.

This finding is almost similar with the scholars explanation listed in the literature. i.e., assessment is the process of collecting information about children's development, learning, health, behavior, academic progress, need for special services, and attainment (Morrison, 2003). And also added assessment is the process of observing, recording, and documenting the work/ activity/ of the children do and how they do it, as a basis for variety of educational decisions that affect the children. Therefore, the finding indicated that most of research participants have knowledge about the notion/concept of assessment.

With regard to the purpose of assessment, the respondents of this paper reflected purposes like, to assess educational objectives, to assess children's progress, to give constructive feedbacks, to present children result in parents conference, to please parents, to gather information for parents, to improve achievement of children, to improve children self confidence by inviting them to talk, to move and to express their idea freely, to know what level the children achieved, to follow their sanitation, to help children attentively, to know their talent, to bring knowledge and attitudinal change in children, to keep their result and help children with their next step learning, to understand children behavior, to recognize children strength and weakness. In addition to the participants interview response was checked by researcher's observation during the instruction was delivered.

This finding reveals that: teachers' explanation on the purpose of assessment is more on routine and minor issues. It is not aimed at modifying the teaching learning process /instructional design/ in line with the assessment results of children. Moreover, their explanation on purpose of assessment is not towards curriculum design and bring for the good behavior of the learners.

Assessment is important for different purpose including for curriculum and program designers, Identification of special needs education and shared information with parents, to Monitor children's progress, to identify Children's strengths and areas of difficulty, to know what children's knowledge and skills in particular areas and what to implement to promote children's learning and development. But the respondents of this paper didn't consider its purpose regarding higher levels. So, it is difficult to say the participants know the purpose of assessment.

With regard to the principles of assessment participants do not know the principles of assessment. But ECCE assessment has its own basic principles. This finding is on the contrary of Gullo's (2006) literatures that have six basic principles of ECCE assessment. These are bring about benefits for children, tailored to a specific purpose, reliable, valid and fair for that purpose, policies designed recognizing the reliability and validity of assessments, age-appropriate in both content and the method of data collection, linguistically appropriate and parents should be a valued source of assessment information as well as an audience for assessment results.

In lines with the tools and methods of assessment, participants used only tests and observation as a means of assessment for children's learning. Therefore, teachers need to be educated in multiple assessment methods and tools that are best achieved by them. Observational checklist enables teachers to understand and identify the various stages of child learning assessment and can be used to document developmental growth across different age groups.

From the above finding on methods and tools of assessment literature states that: there is no one perfect type of assessment that teachers should rely up on it. Rather many scholars argued that multiple ways of assessing children enables to identify many possible ways of diagnosing the needs of children. So based on this big deal, most participants in the study area reported that they assess children learning by using tests and observation only. So the current practices of teachers' assessment method in government primary schools that the researcher checked by observations are tests and observations.

In line with this finding, literature says that multiple assessments should be carried out. There are several types of assessment tools that are used in early childhood programs. These include observation, anecdotal records and checklists, participation charts, rating scales, samples of products, photographs, and tapes. Teachers can also interview families to obtain information about the child (McAfee & Leong, 1997).

Concerning on place and time of assessment, this research finding reveals that they assess children's learning more specifically their learning (cognitive development) in every fifteen days and children's sanitation weekly through observation. With regard to the place, all respondents assess children's cognitive development inside the class room settings and outside to assess their students' physical and socio emotional activity while they are interacting and playing with their peers.

This finding is indeed narrow in its scope or area of assessment. However, most scholars argued that assessment should involve wholeness criteria. For instance, Mindes (2003), assessment is appropriate when it is systematic, multi- disciplinary and based on the everyday tasks of children. The best assessment system is comprehensive in nature that is the assessment yields information about all the developmental areas: such as; motor, temperament, linguistic, cognitive and social/emotional etc.

Literatures also suggest that assessment in early childhood should involve physical development of children (assessing locomotor movements and coordination skills and manipulative movements that develop fine motor skills and hand eye coordination. Besides, the assessment of children should include assessing of their visual and auditory skills, learning styles in identifying possible barriers in this area of development. Socio emotional development is the most important area to develop and strength during the early childhood years and therefore assessment of this area is important for ECCE.

Generally, when the researcher compares the scope or areas of assessment in the study area with the literature, it was mainly limited to measure cognitive outcomes. So, assessment practices implemented

in government schools should cover all these areas to ensure that age appropriate learning and development in all the relevant areas takes place. Even though literature reveals the importance of involving parents as a source of information for effective assessment of children, the results from the teachers indicated that parents are not involved in assessment of children.

The maximum number of participants of this paper reported that they assess children learning in every fifteen days. But Literature encourages teachers to compile regular and ongoing assessment for every child in order to ensure continuity in learning and development. This approach of assessment conducted in schools of the study area is not scientific to fix the gap that will be observed in each sessions of the content to be delivered.

With regard to the challenges of assessment, the participants reported the following challenges. Lacks of qualified teachers, less participation and follow up of parents, Presence of children with some special needs, teachers' lack of assessment skills, ECCE curriculum, and Class sizes/child-teacher-ratios are challenges of assessment reported by the participants.

The above findings are similar to the evaluation reports of ESDP IV (MoE, 2014), in Ethiopia O-class teachers face diverse problems in curriculum implementation. Lack of physical facilities, difficulty in evaluation practice, lesson planning and organizing child activities, teaching-learning process, socio-environmental problem, stating instructional goals, objectives, contents, lack of administrative support, problems related to parental involvement and ineffectiveness of assessments are challenges.

In addition to the above, different research reveals that a number of teachers had little knowledge to develop, use and practice of age appropriate areas of learning assessment and scholars like, Morrison (2003), assessment is a complex process that is influenced by a number of challenges. Institutional related challenges (designing of assessment instrument, ECCE curriculum, child size or child teacher ratios, training and salary of teachers), teacher related challenges (misunderstanding of child's developmental perspective, child's developmental characteristics and characteristics of learning environments are challenges faced the practice of assessment.

Conclusion

The findings of this research revealed that the knowhow of participant teachers and principals on the explanation of assessment is good. But their practices on using appropriate purpose, principles, method, tools and areas of ECCE assessment was not enough and needs concern. Especially participants' knowhow on the purpose and principles of assessment was limited to lower level purposes rather than focusing on changing the instructional design and give feedback for curriculum designers. Teachers' assessment practice was only focused on tests and observation. In addition, participants only practice assessment to measure the learning aspects of children. Children's developmental aspects were not measured scientifically. This implies that knowing the concepts of assessment is not a guarantee to practice assessment and escape the challenges effectively. Therefore, the assessment of ECCE should be done properly and effective to be all rounded.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. Teachers should have awareness about multiple assessment techniques besides the techniques they used by taking different trainings.
2. Concerned bodies like colleges, Universities and other government officials shall better to train teachers to improve their insight on the purpose and principles of assessment.
3. O-class students level of understanding on a given area, topic or lesson will be improved if they are assessed regularly in every sessions. However, Participants in the study set a fixed date to assess children and hence this approach is not effective to diagnose the learning gaps of children

on specific content. For this reason, participants should assess their students/ children/in every activity continuously through the teaching learning process to modify the existing teaching learning modalities used at hand.

4. O-class teachers must be qualified and trained on how to assess children based on the purposes, principles and tools of assessment. The concerned government officials should facilitate a training program on how to assess the children based on the purposes, principles and tools of assessment in collaboration with developmental psychologists, ECCE professionals and other health professionals.
5. Professionals on special needs so should be employed to identify and support the children with exceptional characteristics.

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