

**INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

**Initiative on Early Childhood Care and Education as a tool
to improve the quality of education:**

The case of Woreha Yekatit School located in Kirkos Subcity *Woreda* 4

BY: Hamelmal Yohannes Abraham

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**Indira Gandhi National Open University
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By: Hamelmal Yohannes Abraham

**A Thesis Submitted to Indira Gandhi National Open University
School of Social Work in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for The Degree of Master in Social Work (MSW)**

Advisor: Abera Degefa

May 2015

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled *Initiative on Early Childhood care and Education as a tool to improve quality of education: The case of Yewereha Yekatit School located in Kirkos sub-city Woreda 4* submitted by me for the partial fulfillment of the MSW to Indira Gandhi National Open University,(IGNOU) New Delhi is my own original work and has not been submitted earlier, either to IGNOU or to any other institution for the fulfillment of the requirement for any other program of study. I also declare that no chapter of this manuscript in whole or in part is lifted and incorporated in this report from any earlier work done by me or others.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the introduction of the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ethiopia from the early childhood 'educators' and 'policymakers' perspectives. This research identified the need to study the introduction of ECCE as research into this topic to date has been limited. The purpose of this research was to understand the rationale behind this new initiative as well as exploring the issues of 'implementation and 'quality service delivery' within the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) with particular emphasis in *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE Center. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 respondents (4 key policymakers, Sub-city education Bureau, school director, ECCE coordinator, 2 ECCE educators and 2 care takers). Findings suggest that the policy ideas behind the introduction of ECCE were driven by availing education opportunity, to ensure quality child care services and addressing long standing demands. One of the key findings in this research is that with the introduction of ECCE changes were observed and challenges were encountered as well. Some of the key challenges highlighted in this research were related to issues of quality and access, lack of adequate budgetary allocation. Nonetheless, the findings in this research suggested that ECCE policy has been highly welcomed by all the stakeholders as an important step towards ensuring equality of access and quality provision.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education, ECCE policy reviews and quality service delivery

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Introduction

In the human life cycle, the early childhood period is a critical period that requires due attention and a great deal of investment. Failing to provide children at this stage of development with better nutrition, health care and education deprives them of their right to develop as productive citizens, enjoy a better quality of life and eventually contribute to society's growth. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programs for children from prenatal to seven years of age, their parents and caregivers (MoE 2010).

Strong early childhood foundations, including good health, nutrition and nurturing environment helps to ensure a smooth transition to primary school and a better chance of completing basic education successfully (UNESCO 2010). Further it is stated that, early childhood education and care provides one of the few effective policy means of increasing social and economic opportunities for disadvantaged communities and, therefore, for society as a whole (UNESCO 2010). Based on costs-benefits analysis of ECCE programs to increase equity, the UNESCO conference report demonstrates the better equipped a child is at the start, the more effective his or her education in school will be. ECCE works as a 'multiplier' of collective investments in the school system.

Early Childhood Care and Education is one of the most neglected areas in Ethiopia. The early childhood enrollment rate in 2007/2008 is about 3.9%, nationally negligible figure (MOE 2010). In the last few years, the private sector in the urban centers has shown a growing interest in investing in early childhood education, particularly in Addis Ababa. This opportunity, however, is only accessible for the very few children coming from well-to-do families.

In 2010, in collaboration with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Ethiopian government designed a national

framework for ECCE that includes ideas from many innovative low-cost programs in the rest of Africa. The new Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy Framework is built around four pillars. The first two pillars parental education and a comprehensive program of early child health and stimulation focus on children from the prenatal period to age three and fall under the Health Ministry. The third and fourth pillars are more targeted at children aged four to six. The third pillar - non-formal school readiness - consists primarily of the initiation of Child-to-Child initiatives, through which Grade 6 children act as facilitators in a program of play designed to improve school readiness. The fourth pillar is the establishment of pre-schools of various kinds, including community-based pre-schools, private pre-schools and pre-schools attached to primary schools. In sum, it aims to address children's needs for education, health and nutrition in an integrated fashion through collaboration between the Ministries of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs, Education, and Health. (MoE 2010)

Having noted the benefits of ECCE, the prevailing situation in Ethiopia and the recently developed National Policy Framework on ECCE, I hope this thesis will contribute to pin point the current practice in ECCE with particular emphasis to *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center and a movement from rhetoric toward actions that increasingly incorporate quality into ECCE programmes and their evaluations.

Overview of *Yeworeha Yekatit* ECCE center

Running ECCE in government schools is a new phenomenon emerged after the formulation of ECCE policy very recently. Accordingly, *Yewereha Yekatit* Elementary Government School, located in *Kirkos-subcity* established ECCE program in 2011 and have been operating since then. The total number of ECCE enrolled children is 120. The ECCE center provides the children with morning snack of home- baked bread and tea. The school has organized the parents to come and prepare the tea and serve the children with the snack. The mothers take turns according to set schedule for feeding the children. The children who stay most of the day at school also bring lunch boxes from home to eat for lunch. The school in

collaboration with a local NGO called MCDP has constructed kitchen and ceilings for four classrooms; has purchased and supplied kerosene stoves and kitchen utensils and drinking cups; it also provides on regular basis consumable items like kerosene and cleaning materials; has provided four metal shelves for placing teaching aid materials and dolls; has supplied a TV set and DVD player for children to watch various edutainment videos; and the teachers have attended capacity building training. Refresher trainings provided for ECCE teachers have proven effect in transforming their approach from conventional kindergarten style to the ECCE in providing age appropriate service to the children in the local context. Parents of the children have on their own initiative built a shade that serves as dining room for the children. The teachers also due to lack of staff room have built a small provisional shade from discarded construction materials. But it is worth noting that the school has already allocated an additional classroom for the ECCE that is being converted to a staff room. Renovation and furnishing the center with play and cognitively stimulating materials have considerably contributed to the successful achievement of the center. Tangible evidence in this regard is the recent award received by the school from the Addis Ababa Administration, winning a model ECCE program title in the *Woreda*. Being a model center, it has become a focal point of learning and sharing of experience for other schools in the *Woreda*.

Problem statement:

Early Childhood Care and Education supports children's survival, growth, development and learning, including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal and non formal settings (UNESCO Education For All - Global Monitoring Report 2007). The early years represent the most vulnerable time in the individual human development. It is of course, the best time for ensuring “strong foundations” for later learning and life chances. Early Childhood Care and Education is the foundation of:

- Social inclusion and equality in life chances;

- Cognitive, social, physical and emotional development of the individual
- Respect of the basic individual human rights

Having stated the above, recently a policy has been developed to address the longstanding need of its citizens with regard to early childhood care and education. Regardless challenges are faced by ECCE centers and ECCE educators as well. Although *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center have attempted to render quality service delivery as stated in the policy but did not achieve it fully. Due to the fact that ECCE is a relatively recent phenomenon, existing research on this subject remains scanty and limited.

Objectives

General Objective: This thesis aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of policy makers at MoE, early childhood educators of *Yewereha Yekatit* as well as the perspectives of local government regarding the introduction of Early Childhood care and Education initiative in Ethiopia. It seeks to understand and analyze these perspectives within the broader Ethiopia ECCE policy context with particular focus on the implementation of ECCE at *Woreha Yekatit* School and how this relates to issues of quality provision within the ECCE sector in Ethiopia.

The research also has interrelated core (specific) objectives:

- Firstly, to evaluate the implementation process of the ECCE policy as well as exploring the rationale behind the ECCE initiative.
- Secondly, to examine the impacts the newly introduced ECCE policy has on the perception of those working directly with children under the preschool settings participating in the ECCE program at *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center.
- Thirdly, to explore the experiences of *Yewereha Yekatit* early childhood educators about ECCE policy and how this policy is impacting on the quality of services as well as shaping the movement towards improvement in the quality of education.

Research Questions

The current research is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perspectives of key policymakers on the thinking behind the ECCE initiative?
2. What was the rationale behind the ECCE initiative?
3. What are the perspectives of *Woreha Yekatit* ECCE educators on the introduction of ECCE?
4. Challenges encountered by ECCE educators while implementing ECCE policy?
5. How does this new initiative impacts on quality of education?

Universe of the study

The study will focus on those individuals responsible in designing ECCE policy and those who are involved in implementing it such as (*Woreda* level Women, Children's, Youth Affairs Bureau, Education bureau at sub-city level, *Woreda* level and ECCE educators of *Yewereha Yekaktit* and school principals.

Methodology

A qualitative method will be employed in exploring wide range of perspectives from various sources. Data will be explored and analyzed qualitatively to develop clear understanding about the overall implementation of the program, on lessons learnt and challenges encountered in the process of designing, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the ECCE and how it is assumed as a tool to improve the quality of education. In short, using a combination of different methods will meaningfully enhance capturing wide range of data for this thesis.

The data sources for the study on ECCE will be:

MoE relevant staff (higher officials responsible in designing the ECCE policy), *Yewereha Yekaktit* ECCE educators, school principals, local authorities such as *Woreda* Women, Children and Youth Affairs Bureau, and stakeholders,

Relevant documents on ECCE (plan, reports, monitoring and evaluation results, review reports)

Instruments (study Tools)

In order to explore and identify overview on ECCE, structured tools will be used to serve as a guide for in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions with ECCE educators and other key informants. The designing of the tools proceeded with discussions to have shared understanding on the general conceptual frameworks of ECCE. Each instrument involved questions from the key elements of ECCE in assessing impact of (system of operation and outcomes). Using qualitative, individual interviews, FGDs and observations, extensive qualitative information will be generated to produce thematically organized information about the overall performance of ECCE implementation at *Woreha Yekatit* ECCE center and eventually meet the purpose of this thesis.

Data Collection

a) In-depth Interview

In order to elicit and capture views, attributions and perceptions of stakeholders, on ECCE project, structured and flexible interviews will be conducted with key informants and partners of the organization. One-on-one discussions will be held with *Yewereha Yekaktit* school principals, ECCE educators, Sub city and *Woreda* Officials, MoE staff.

b) Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussion will be held with school principal, ECCE educators to get their perspectives about the overall achievements of ECCE program focusing on the changes

attained so far. About 6-8 persons will take part in each FGD session. Every discussion session will be facilitated by the student in collaboration with one of the assigned program staff's.

c) Observations

As part and parcel of the data gathering techniques, direct observation also will provide firsthand information to learn about the accomplishment of *Yewereha Yekaktit* ECCE center and its successful and sustainable impacts on the children. Site visits will be made to see the ongoing activities of the ECCE center, and documentation of information at the office.

Data analysis and documenting results

Data obtained from different tools will be examined and categorized into various themes. Using manual coding methods of qualitative analysis, discussions will be sorted out considering common views and reflections of the respondents in line with ECCE implementation.

Limitations

The key limitations in this research were mostly related to small sample population, limited scope and lack of time. Also, the fact that I am still a developing researcher even though I have conducted interviews in previous academic studies, I was still a novice in interviewing key 'elite' informants in policymaking and this may have impacted on the interview process and the information gained. Therefore, bearing in mind the small sampled size the findings and conclusions stated in this research are merely tentative, suggesting that further research is needed on the possible impact of the ECCE with a much larger sample population or preferably adopting quantitative approach that can reflect larger or national population. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that

this research was delimited to explore the impact and experience behind the introduction of the ECCE as experienced by our key respondents within the ECCE center at *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center.

Significance of the study

ECCE has been acknowledged by research as beneficial for children and the society in general, thus research into the ECCE is of utmost importance in order to monitor its success and future development. This research contributes unique knowledge into regarding the timing of strategic interventions and investments within ECCE sector by state governments. This research has been designed to address some of these key issues by exploring the current introduction of ECCE and the implications of this new initiative within the education sector in Ethiopia both from the early childhood educators', the policymakers' and also other relevant officials perspectives with particular emphasis on *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center school so as to pin point in line with the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education; attained results since implementation, lessons learned and challenges in particular and inform effective future policy in this area in general.

Chapterization

- The first chapter of this thesis introduces the key aims and objectives, followed by the background information into ECCE in Ethiopia leading to the issues of policy development and recent introduction of the ECCE. In addition, the chapter features the rationale behind this research, research questions and method adopted in generating the data. The significance and limitations of this research thesis are also presented in the first chapter.
- The second chapter will present the reviews on literature around issues of improving quality of education, ECCE policy quality, and other relevant issues.
- The third chapter will state the key methodological standing and the justification for the method applied to the data collection. The chapter also presents the chosen sample in this research and elaborates on the rationale for its preferred respondents group. It also will provide the background information of participants as well as ethical considerations.
- The fourth chapter will address the key findings from the data. These findings will be structured into emerging themes and some of the participants' key responses will be presented in this chapter.
- The fifth and final chapter will discuss the findings in the light of the literatures reviewed in this research. The chapter will also provide the tentative conclusions as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter two

Literature Review

This chapter presents concept and definition of ECCE, benefits of ECCE, path ways through ECCE in Ethiopia, National Policy Framework for ECCE in Ethiopia, ECCE in sub-Saharan Africa and more importantly the issue of quality service delivery in ECCE sector.

2.1 Overview of ECCE Definition and Concepts

There is a worldwide consensus among psychologists and biologists, that pre-school age is critical period in the life span of a child. It is during this period that foundation for all later development is laid. A child is highly receptive to all that prevails in his environment and his learning potentials are at their peak. Whatever assimilated in this foundation period gradually stabilizes later on. (Aparajita and Rita Choudhury 2002)

Hence pre-school years have been acknowledged as the most significant period in the life of an individual. The reasons behind this are:

- Research has shown that the first few years of life influence later behavior to a large extent. Many of the ways of thinking and behaviors of adults can be traced from early childhood experiences.
- The rate of development in all areas-physical, motor, cognitive, language, social and emotional is most rapid during these years. In this period it is possible to learn skills which become difficult and at time impossible, to acquire at a large age.
- Since development is proceeding at a very fast rate, unfavorable experiences such as lack of adequate food, nurturance and care,

unhealthy living conditions, sickness, lack of interaction with adults or exploitative working conditions will hinder development to a considerable extent. In the same way, favorable experiences will foster development. (Aparajita Chowdhury and Rita Choudhury 2002,).

And also early childhood care is one of the best ways to assure the child a smooth transition into primary school. It is also a critical factor in the child's subsequent transition to adulthood, influencing both social skills and behavioral choices (Aparajita Chowdhury and Rita Choudhury 2002).

Early education programs should be designed to facilitate the fulfillment of potential unique to each child. Each child enters a program with individual experiences defining the way he approaches his world. Some 3- and 4- year olds may have developed a basic trust in and positive expectations from adults and from all new environments .Other 3- and 4-year olds approach the world from a fearful perspective, with little trust and confused expectations. If experiences for many children are not carefully planned to meet their current and emerging developmental needs, the children will fall further behind and their potentials for becoming socially competent adults are diminished (Patricia S. Miller and James O. McDowell, 1993, page 74)

In a nut shell, the early childhood years set the foundations for life. Ensuring that young children have positive experiences, that their rights are guaranteed and that their needs for health, stimulation and support are met is crucial to their well-being and development. In a context where family and community structures are constantly changing and countries are going through rapid social and economic changes, early childhood programs complement the roles that parents and other caregivers play in raising children during the early years. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs not only benefit children and

families, they also have the potential to reduce social inequality, and benefit communities and societies at large. The contributions of ECCE to the healthy development and future well-being of children who are particularly economically and socially disadvantaged have become a vital public issue in Ethiopia, with implications for government, families, business, and NGOs (Martin Wood head, August 2009).

2.2 Benefits of Early Childhood Care and Education

Children's early development lays the foundations for lifelong learning. Indeed, numerous researchers (Laevers, 2002; OECD, 2001; Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart., 1993; Vandell and Wolfe, 2000; Waldfogel, 2002), argue that when they are accompanied by effective support measures (fiscal, social or employment based) for families and communities, programmes can help children to "...make a good start in life, irrespective of their background, and facilitate their social integration" (Bennett and Neuman, 2004: 424).

Clearly purporting the importance of ECCE, Barnett (2004) posits that its contribution to the healthy development and future well-being of economically and socially disadvantaged children has become a vital public issue with significant implications for families, business, private philanthropy and government alike. Likewise, researchers (Bennett, 2006; Bowman *et al.*, 2001; Campbell *et al.*, 2001) argue that ECCE programs not only address the care, nurturing and education of young children, but that they also contribute to the resolution of complex social issues.

Economists assert that on the basis of available evidence, investment in early childhood is the most powerful investment a country can make. They add that returns over the life course multiply many times the size of the original investment (Irwin *et al.*, 2007). International longitudinal studies justify the relationship between investment in early childhood education and long term

private and social outcomes (Cleveland *et al.*, 1998 and 2003, Heckman and Masterov, 2004; Schweinhart *et al.*, 1993; Schweinhart 2004).

Similarly, Carneiro and Heckman (2003) claim that for every US\$1 spent on a disadvantaged child in the early years, US\$7 could be saved in the longer-term; through reduced spending on remedial education, healthcare and crime. There is widespread agreement (Cleveland *et al.*, 1998 and 2003, Heckman and Masterov, 2004; Schweinhart *et al.*, 1993; Schweinhart 2004) that significant long-term productivity gains can be garnered for societies through appropriate investment in quality ECCE. Fundamentally, high-quality ECCE not only raises high school graduation rates and test scores, decades later, but it also leads to higher incomes and lower crime rates.

ECCE services are particularly beneficial for low income and disadvantaged families (Cleveland *et al.*, 1998 and 2003; Currie and Thomas, 1995; Hayes, 2007; NESF, 2001 and 2005; OECD, 2001 and 2006b; Schweinhart, 2004) with “...spill over effects on the future of children in their education and socialization” (OECD, 2006a: 109). Well resourced ECCE can be a particularly significant protective factor in helping children, parents and other care givers to cope with adversity (Woodhead, 2006). The absence of protective factors, where children are deprived of ECCE opportunities for example, may increase the risks to young children’s well-being (Sylva *et al.*, 2004; Woodhead, 2006). Consequently, children’s experiences in the early years play a pivotal role in shaping later outcomes.

While a number of researchers (Dearing, Barry and Zaslow, 2006; Zigler, Kagan and Hall, 1996) argue that ECCE programs cannot substantially address issues of structural poverty and institutional discrimination for children denoted as being at risk, the OECD (2001 and 2006a) assert that children who receive high-quality

ECCE show better cognitive and language abilities than children in lower-quality settings. Similarly, Phillips *et al.* (2000) claim that high-quality ECCE is associated with a range of outcomes that all parents would wish for their child, including; co-operation with adults, the ability to initiate and sustain positive exchanges with peers, and early competence in math and reading (*ibid.*).

2.3 Early Childhood in Sub-Saharan Africa:

Until recently, the priority for governments across sub-Saharan Africa has been to achieve EFA goals for primary education. In many cases, ECCE was neglected and the overall balance of access is inequitable, favoring more advantaged urban children. In many countries, private providers and NGOs, including faith and community based initiatives, play a major role in ECCE services. Many governments have battled to regulate and assure quality in private, faith-based and community facilities. As a rule, in sub-Saharan Africa many private early learning centers follow highly formal models of education, focusing on the “acquisition of the 3R’s (reading, writing and arithmetic) and relying on teacher-centered methods for development of knowledge and skills” (Okengo 2010: 7). This may be partly because parents see this as the most appropriate approach to preparing children for later schooling (Biersteker *et al.* 2008: 228). Private centres tend to have better facilities than faith-based or community facilities, which are often not tailored to children’s needs. Classrooms are overcrowded (community schools in the countries in sub-Saharan Africa that collect the relevant data have, on average, nine children per square meter). Play materials are often fragile and unsuitable for the children’s age group. Many countries have not yet developed ECCE curricula. Where countries do have curricula, as in South Africa, Kenya and Ghana, the amount of time that children spend in ECCE facilities is highly variable. Many facilities use a language of instruction that is not the mother tongue of the students. ECCE can be effective in

assisting children to develop language skills, but this is much more difficult unless at least some instruction is in their mother tongue (UNESCO 2010a: 11).

2.4 Pathways through ECCE in Ethiopia

The first government primary school was opened in 1908 in Addis Ababa. Haile Selassie's imperial regime (1930-1974) largely limited educational access to students from an elite background in urban areas; the system was criticized for being bureaucratic, wasteful, overly academic and irrelevant to the lives of most Ethiopians (Kate Orkin Workeneh Abebe Yadete and Martin Woodhead, September 2012). During the imperial regime, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church opposed the establishment of a modern public educational system and provided its own elementary and intermediate religious schools. Male children began the first stage of religious school (known colloquially as 'priest school') at the age of four, when they attended services and participated in drilled practices of the alphabet and numbers. Although priest schools were not directly linked to religious services, the children who did well went on to become deacons. Similarly, mosques gave education in the Koran for boys, although girls were able to attend if they wished (Kate Orkin Workeneh Abebe Yadete and Martin Woodhead, September 2012).

The first secular pre-schools opened during the first decades of the twentieth century and were attached to private schools in Addis Ababa, such as the English School, the German School and the Lycee Gebre Mariam. It was only in 1962 that the Ministry of National Community Development and Social Affairs set up a few pilot pre-schools in urban areas; these were initially staffed by Swedish and American volunteers and later taken over by female community workers. The first six month training program for pre-school workers was established in 1971. By 1972, there were 37 privately owned pre-schools and 30 community pre-schools in urban centers (Kate Orkin Workeneh Abebe Yadete and Martin Woodhead, September 2012). In 1974, a revolution, led by Mengistu Haile

Mariam, deposed the Emperor and set up a Marxist regime run by a revolutionary committee, the Derg. The regime made major efforts to expand access to primary education. As a result, the number of primary schools increased from 3196 in 1974/75 to 7900 in 1985/86 and the number of children attending increased from fewer than 1 million to 2.4 million in this period (Kate Orkin Workeneh Abebe Yadete and Martin Woodhead, September 2012). The rapid pace of expansion resulted in low-quality buildings and teachers with only very basic or no training. Instruction was in English and Amharic, rather than in the children's mother tongue, and the curriculum was deeply politicized (Kate Orkin Workeneh Abebe Yadete and Martin Woodhead, September 2012). The Derg also prioritized state childcare, linked to the policy of encouraging women to participate in public life. Accordingly, the government encouraged communities to establish preschools, leading to the first secular pre-schools in rural areas. Enrolment at the national level increased from 7573 children in 1975 to 102,000 children in 1990 (Kate Orkin Workeneh Abebe Yadete and Martin Woodhead, September 2012). A preschool curriculum was developed, along with a training centre for early education teachers in Addis Ababa (with the assistance of UNICEF). Nevertheless, many rural childcare facilities were very basic and were run by untrained village workers.

From the late 1970s to 1991, Ethiopia was embroiled in civil war, starting in the north and later spreading to the southeast. There were also severe droughts and a famine, which lasted from 1984 to 1986. These developments reversed much of the improved access to primary education that had been achieved. In 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and its allies overthrew the Derg. At this point, the country's infrastructure was devastated, access to education was low, and extreme poverty was widespread.

When EPRDF took power in 1991, the leadership identified education and health as two priority social sectors. The government's objectives regarding education

have been strongly linked to attaining the MDGs, but EFA goals have not been given equal priority, with universal primary enrolment and gender equity generally seen as primary goals (Kate Orkin Workeneh Abebe Yadete and Martin Woodhead, September 2012).

Then Government of Ethiopia adopted the EFA goals to ensure universal access to and completion of basic education and reducing the adult illiteracy rate by half in 2015; Coverage and access to pre-school education for children between 4-6 years of age is very limited, as only 2.1 per cent of the total number of children in the appropriate age bracket has access to pre-school education and services; and this is limited to children in major towns and it hardly exists in the rural areas. The concept of ECCE dates back to the 17th century Ethiopian philosophers Zär'a Ya'aqob and his disciple Wäldä Haywat (Sumner, 1986)¹¹ while others associated its development to religious education given to children at the age of four in which children learnt alphabets in church services in the medieval Ethiopia. The first modern kindergarten was established in Dire Dawa for the children of French consultants who were helping the construction of the first railroad in Ethiopia; and the number of kindergarten in the country grew to 77 in 1974 and 912 in 1990 (UNESCO and IICBA,2007/2008)²¹. Most of these pre-schools are run by private individuals, religious institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. The increase in the number of private and public preschools underscores the growing belief that early childhood education should become an integral component of public education. Gross enrolment rate of children 4-6 years in kindergarten was estimated at 2.7 per cent in 2005/06 which was a little higher than 2.3 per cent of previous year. (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa, 2007/2008).

2.5 Reasons for Developing ECCE National Framework and Strategy

In 2010, in collaboration with United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Ethiopian government designed a national framework for ECCE that includes ideas from many innovative low-cost programs in the rest of Africa. The development of the ECCE Framework is a welcome policy advance. The goal is for the government to continue to regulate private sector and NGO providers, but also to begin to offer low-cost alternative ECCE programs using two approaches. Government primary schools are being asked to provide a reception year and teachers will be asked to train Grade 5 and 6 children to lead Child-to-Child programs, focusing on pre-school age children in their communities (National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2010).

The term Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) refers to a holistic and comprehensive approach to policies and programs for children from prenatal to seven years of age, their parents and caregivers (National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2010). The new Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy Framework is built around four pillars. The first two pillars parental education and a comprehensive program of early child health and stimulation focus on children from the prenatal period to age three and fall under the Health Ministry. The third and fourth pillars are more targeted at children aged four to six. The third pillar - non-formal school readiness - consists primarily of the initiation of Child-to-Child initiatives, through which Grade 6 children act as facilitators in a program of play designed to improve school readiness. The fourth pillar is the establishment of pre-schools of various kinds, including community-based pre-schools, private pre-schools and pre-schools attached to primary schools. In sum, it aims to address children’s needs for education, health and nutrition in an integrated fashion through collaboration

between the Ministries of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs, Education, and Health (National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2010).

The aim of this ECCE National Policy Framework is to address the longstanding need of its citizens with regard to early childhood care and education. To start with, a national base-line study was conducted to explore the status of early education and care in the country. In a final workshop, a technical committee, consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, UNICEF, the Addis Ababa University, the Kotebe College of Teacher Education, the Save the Children Alliance and the Basic Education Network was formed as a Task Force and prepared this policy framework for ECCE, a Strategic Operational Plan and Guidelines to be presented. It is believed that the introduction of the National Policy Framework, Strategic Operational Plan and the Guidelines in the county will create a difference in the lives of the Ethiopian children. (National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education MoE 2010).

Given the major reforms taking place to achieve EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for universal primary education, the Ethiopian government has, until recently, paid much less attention to ECCE. The ECCE services have been offered almost entirely by private, non-governmental and faith-based providers. As a result, very few children have been able to access them. The national Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) 1 for pre-school, which covers children from the ages of four to six, was only 4.2 percent in 2008/9 (National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2010). The pre-school GER has not improved much since 2008: in 2010/11 it was 5.2 percent (National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2010).

In 2010, in collaboration with United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Ethiopian government designed a national framework for ECCE that includes ideas from many innovative low-cost programs in the rest of Africa. The development of the ECCE Framework is a welcome policy advance. The goal is for the government to continue to regulate private sector and NGO providers, but also to begin to offer low-cost alternative ECCE programs using two approaches. Government primary schools are being asked to provide a reception year and teachers will be asked to train Grade 5 and 6 children to lead Child-to-Child programs, focusing on pre-school age children in their communities (National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education 2010). As a rule, children from poorer households and rural children are least likely to gain access to ECCE services, with the consequence that inequalities linked to their home circumstances are amplified by inequitable educational opportunities. While small numbers of NGO and donor-supported programs target specific disadvantaged groups, these programs reach a relatively small proportion of children that might benefit from ECCE.

2.6 Pillars of the 2010 ECCE Framework

Parental Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hygiene, nutrition and early stimulation ▪ All age groups ▪ Delivered by the Health Extension Program, Model Families program and Adult Literacy Program
Health and Early Stimulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring growth and nutrition, immunization, and preventative health care ▪ ☐ Prenatal period to age three ▪ Part of the Family Health Package

Non-formal school readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child-to-Child program ▪ Six-year-old children taught for one year by a Grade Six child ▪ Organized by local primary school directors and Grade Six teachers with parental support
Establishment of pre-schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Basic skills, social and emotional competence ▪ Initially six-year-old children taught for one year, extended to children aged four to six ▪ Ministry of Education responsible for supervision, training, curriculum development; District ▪ Education Offices responsible for community-based schools

The ECCE in Ethiopia have four basic pillars:

Source: Ministry of Education (2010b)

2.7 Structure of Coordination of the Development and Implementation of ECCE Services in Ethiopia

A holistic programmatic approach for the implementation of ECCE is used. The high level Steering Committee is seen as the leading body for all ECCE activities to be performed. It is suggested to appoint one highly qualified senior person as ECCE coordinator. She or he will be the chairperson of the taskforce and will be the coordinator of the ECCE Unit. The ECCE Unit is a special Unit that consist of ECCE focal persons of each Ministry involved and is part of the Task Force. The Task Force will operate on the basis of a broad mandate of the steering committee. The taskforce is responsible for developing proposals, facilitating transparent decision-making by the steering committee, and overseeing and

coordinating implementation, monitoring and evaluation. There will be an ECCE-expertise centre established within the Addis Ababa University. This centre will take up the responsibility for monitoring and evaluation, research and innovation, training of trainers at degree level, development of a degree course on ECCE. At Regional, *Wereda* and *Kebele* level it is a continuation of the suggested structure at Federal level. The three Ministries involved are working together and there will be one body responsible. At community level it is suggested to have the ECCE Implementation committee the members of this committee are members of the Kebele Education and Training Board (KETB), *Kebele* Health Committee (KHC) and *Kebele* Women's Association (KWA). (National Policy Framework for ECCE, MoE 2010)

2.8 ECCE as a tool to Improve Quality of Education

The concept of quality in relation to ECCE - and indeed childhood in Ethiopia - is context linked and time-specific. Over the decades, this concept has been defined and re-defined and understanding of quality has evolved. It is evident from the National Review that while some ECCE services would have historically operated within certain standards and criteria, quality was not a term that appeared often in documentation. Even the term, 'early childhood care and education' has only appeared in the lexicon of policy in recent years, (Ministry of Education, National Policy for Early Childhood care and Development, 2010). This is primarily due to the fact that childcare and early education were traditionally regarded as separate issues, with services delivered by the State falling into either one or the other category. State provision of early education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and usually falls between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs Bureau. The involvement of so many different government departments in the ECCE sector highlights an important issue emerging from the National Review, i.e., the

existence of multiple agendas for ECCE in Ethiopia at policy level. Policy documentation regarding the development of ECCE has been generated by a wide variety of interested parties at national, regional and local level and reveals a variety of perspectives on what constitutes quality. For example, accessibility, affordability, catering for special needs, continuity of care etc. have all been cited as elements of quality provision. (Ministry of Education, National Policy for Early Childhood care and Development, 2010)

2.9 Current Support and Service Delivery Systems for ECCE in Ethiopia

The major challenges as regards the current ECCE practices identified in the 2007 Situation Assessment Study are: high payment that is requested to attend the pre-school, lack of proper training of pre-school teachers; lack of standard curriculum and guidelines; lack of culturally relevant story books; quasi non-existence of alternative care and education services for the majority of the children population in the rural areas; lack of access to early childhood education for almost all children and especially children from low socio-economic backgrounds; lack of awareness about the value and type of care and education of young children; low salary for teachers, causing high staff turnover; lack of early childhood education professionals; misconception about teaching children “because they are children!”; and the use of foreign languages (mainly English) as a medium of instruction. (Martin Wood head, August 2009).

However, there are some important experiences and opportunities to be reaped from current ECCE implementation. For example a curriculum for the three to six-year-old already exists; quality assurance and licensing mechanisms are in place in some regions; administrative offices exist even though they take the role of coordinating ECCE as a secondary one; there are experienced teachers who can easily be mobilized to serve ECCE with a training required. In addition,

private investors, NGOs and religious institutions appear to show interest in expanding ECCE centers. There are also potential traditional, cultural and social institutions like *Iddirs* and other associations such as women's associations/groups, farmers associations and *Kebele* settings, as well as practices that can be resources for ECCE expansion. There is still a major implementation and financing gap. (Martin Wood head, August 2009)

As this thesis being the first study made at *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE experience it will give detailed description of the implementation process, attained results since inception, also lessons learned and challenges encountered and recommendations to address the gaps. The study is done by taking into account the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education. Hence it will give representation of what the policy states and what the actual practice at the ground level is by linking the views of policy makers and ECCE educators.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This research aimed to analyze the perspectives and perceptions of early childhood 'educators' and 'policymakers' regarding the introduction of ECCE initiative in Ethiopia with particular emphasis on *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center. Particularly, it aimed to explore the experiences of preschool educators regarding the introduction of ECCE scheme. It also hoped to shed light on how this idea came about and became a policy priority within the program for government in 2010 by specifically examining the perspectives of the key policymakers. This research remains an exploratory study given that the ECCE initiative is so new and there has been little research in this area. According to Stebbins (2001) researcher adopts exploratory study when there is "little or no scientific knowledge" regarding a particular phenomenon (p. 6). In this research qualitative research paradigm was chosen rather than quantitative, as qualitative approach provided the opportunity to gain more in-depth and coherent data from the participant experiences and perceptions. In their work, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) noted that qualitative methods are methods that "require direct engagement with members of the settings being studied and that gather information about their experiences in their own words" (p. 603). Thus, qualitative research paradigm was identified as more suitable for the nature of this exploratory study.

More generally this research was guided by 'interpretivist' epistemology rather than positivism, since interpretivism places the researcher into the world of research subjects, thus understanding the world from their point of view or as Bryman (2012) suggested it is the researcher's opportunity to "grasp the subjective meaning of social actions" (p. 30). The research was also guided by 'constructionist' ontological positioning as opposed to objectivism. This positioning implies that the researcher views the social world as social

constructions, where “meaning is constructed in and through interaction” with others (Bryman, 2012, p. 34).

3.1. Qualitative interviewing

In order to achieve the aims of this research, qualitative design was adopted to explore the introduction of ECCE and its impact with particular emphasis on *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center. While quantitative method may be valuable at times, I did not think that it was suitable for the scope of this research considering its exploratory nature and delimitation. Therefore, qualitative design particularly semi-structured interview method was preferred as more appropriate to gain richer data from the participants on the topic under study (Mason, 2002). Kvale (2007) defined semi-structured interviews as interviews “with purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 8). Qualitative semi-structured interviews gave me the opportunity “to unravel how people construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and that offer rich insights” (Kvale, 2007, p. x). Through this method I was also able to control the environment and correct any misunderstanding arising as well as make clarifications to the participants where necessary

By conducting semi-structured interviews with educators and policymakers this research gained multiple perspectives about the key issues of concern, thus the data sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). And also I have used FGD method and observation while I was visiting the ECCE center. The data was collected over a period of four weeks (From second week of January up to First week of February 2015), giving time for possible absences or cancellations. Each interview lasted 25 for individuals and 55 for groups. Every research method including qualitative interviewing has its limitations. Transcribing and making meaning out of a large

qualitative data set can be very time consuming and this can be seen as a limitation of qualitative design (Patton, 2002). However, in order to gain in-depth knowledge about the topic under study qualitative interviewing with its limited sample population was considered the most suitable method for data collection.

3.2. Data analysis technique

In this research I have adopted 'thematic analyses' technique to analyze the data generated from the semi-structured interviews. This method is widely used within qualitative research and was most suited to the exploratory nature of this research. For the 'theme' analysis I applied Braun and Clarke (2006) step-by step guide to analyzing data. The analyzing process began by transcribing the interviews, this gave me the chance to become familiar with the data, and this, as Braun and Clarke (2006) noted is the first phase of thematic analysis. Following this is the process of coding involving close examination of the text and using color coding strategy to highlight similar themes arising. It also involved stepping away from the data as well as constantly re-thinking and re-doing and reviewing of the arising themes before finalizing and making a report of the key themes emerging from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved more than just step-by-step route as it meant moving back and forth between the identified stages of data.

3.3. Access and Sampling population

3.3.1. Sampling method

Considering the explorative nature of this research I have adopted non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling method to select suitable participants (Sarantakos, 2005). This meant that research subjects were purposefully selected based on their expertise, knowledge and experiences of the topic under study. The selection of the sample however depended on who was available and importantly willing to participate in the research (Sarantakos,

2005). In gaining access to potential participants, I have used "interpersonal contacts and referrals " recruitment technique to solicit for assistance from people I already know including the educators and other professionals in the ECCE field with whom I have long established meaningful rapport (McLean & Campbell, 2003).

Purposive sampling was also adapted to select policymakers for semi-structured interviews. With this information I made contact with the *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE Center and contacted the possible participants through phone calls and informal visits to the key departmental offices. Thus, through the referrals and snowballing technique I was able to gain access to four policymakers who have the knowledge and the experiences about the phenomenon under study (Sarantakos, 2005).

3.3.2. Sample

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a group that Bradley (2011) defined as 'core policy makers'. Others defined this group as an 'elite' group within policymaking sphere (Reisman, 1993, Dexter, 2006). Reisman (1993) described this elite group as people that are in an important position and require "VIP or very important people interviewing treatment" (p. 528). However, as Reisman (1993) and Dexter (2006) acknowledged this term is loaded with "connotations of power". Following these analysis and being eager to find the right term for my choice of participants, I acknowledge the limitation with the term policymakers considering that the scope of this study did not allow me to interview all 'core policy makers' who could have been involved in the process of policymaking . The sampling population was comprised of two groups: early childhood educators and ECCE policymakers. The participants were both male and female.

Four policymakers from the Ministry of Education and Early Years Education Policy Unit were interviewed. They have been involved in the area of early childhood education for many years and were all present when the ECCE came to place, with two policymakers having a direct role in the design of this new policy.

Two early childhood educators were interviewed. In each setting the coordinator and other staff members such as care takers working directly with the children

participating in ECCE were interviewed. All participants have been working in the ECCE sector between four to six years.

3.3.3. Rationale for target population

The rationale was to identify those personnel who were present during the time of the introduction of ECCE scheme in order to gain understanding about the rationale, ideas and the policy priorities behind this new initiative. Hence, the policymakers from the Ministry of Education were the most probable key informants in this research. The rationale behind focusing on policymakers from Ministry of Education was based on the fact that the department has been responsible for the introduction of the ECCE and its implementation in Ethiopia. The rationale behind selecting ECCE educators was also clearly based on the fact that they were the people who had firsthand experience of this new policy change; and hence, by involving them in this research it will give an insight into the impact on the ECCE sector. By selecting educators they were given the opportunity to express their views as well as experiences related to the ECCE so far and the way this new scheme may have impacted on their practice and services within the ECCE sector at *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center.

3.4. Ethical issues

In every research there are ethical issues the researcher has to acknowledge and take into consideration. In order to ensure that all participation will be voluntary and that all participants will be well informed about the research under study I have taken the following steps (Sarantakos, 2005). The letters to the management were sent to gain a formal access to possible respondents (see Appendix 1). All participants were provided with detailed description of the study, its purpose and procedures (see Appendix 2), as well as the main interview questions guide prior to the interviews (see Appendix 3 and 4). Informed consents were also gained from all the participants. Anonymity and confidentiality was assured to

the participants, their names were not used in the research and in the participants' responses presented in the findings chapter. Crucially, anonymity was meticulously implemented for the policymakers considering that policymakers represent a small elite sample population that is easily identifiable. Thus the background information about policymakers has not been defined more closely to avoid breach of ethics and to ensure anonymity.

Another issue that is highlighted by Marshall and Rossman (1995) is researchers own biases and how they may impact on the research process and results and such consideration meant that I remained self-reflexive throughout the whole research process.

Chapter Four

Finding

A total of 11 participants were interviewed in this research with the aim of capturing their perspectives around the introduction of ECCE policy. This chapter presents the data that have emerged from the semi-structured interviews, which I have presented and organized under four key themes to help my analysis of data. Thematic analyses were adopted to highlight and organize key responses that can give weight to my key findings and help in more systematic discussions. The views of respondents (policymakers and educators) have been summarized under key themes with various sub-headings together with some of the direct quotes from the interviews to show the depth and richness of qualitative data. These are presented in italics and some words in [] are added to make the meaning more clear to the reader.

It is important to remind the reader that this research attempted to shed some light into the rationale behind the introduction of ECCE as well as giving a glimpse into the implementation process and the possible impact this new initiative has had on the ECCE sector with particular emphasis on *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE experience. Findings are limited to the respondents in this research thus should be interpreted in the context of the limitations in this research.

The People interviewed from Ministry of Education were; curriculum development department head, monitoring and evaluation office in education related matters, education sector development head and educational policy development department representative. For the purpose of narrating the finding I have shortened their names in the analysis in the following way;

- Curriculum Development Department Head (CD)

- Monitoring and evaluation in educational related matters (ME)
- Education sector Development Head (ED)
- Educational policy development Department Representative (EP)

The following findings regarding rationale behind the ECCE policy, consultation process leading to ECCE, educator's impression of the ECCE policy; semi-structured interviews were used and responses were put in a collective form.

4.1. Policy

4.1.1. Rationale behind the ECCE policy

The interview was conducted on Jan 13/2015 at Ministry of Education at Curriculum Development Department Bureau .Accordingly; four policy makers who were involved in developing the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education were interviewed to capture their views;

And I have put their replies as follows;

When asked about the ECCE initiative and how it came about, the four policymakers described that the policy priority is;

The ECCE initiative is not something that came out of the blue, it has been lobbied for a long time people have been asking for it for a long time may be not in a such a specific term, but they have been lobbying for the state to become more involved in paying for services to fund service delivery as opposed to paying for capital grants to build buildings or create spaces (ED, 2015). Economic recession, it has proved is going to affect families, they are going to make decisions that are cheaper; they are going to keep the children home (EP, 2015). If we waited nobody would get anything, my experience with politics is you have to grab it when you get it, you know there is no point in saying well we should wait until it is perfect, because nothing will ever happen (ME, 2015). To avail education opportunity (ED,2015).

One of the policy makers, (CD) whose particular expertise is in developing curriculum noted that innate abilities of a child might be fully developed already before entering compulsory schooling and thereafter would be only amendable at high costs and efforts. And then CD further summarized the key arguments as follows: For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, childcare provisions are supposed to lower the risk of falling behind throughout their schooling, and thus breaking the links of inherited inequality. Policies assuring quality childcare intend to promote homogenizing early childhood investments. And efficiency and equity of education are increasingly considered as mutually reinforcing. To sum up, an early childhood investment generates growing attention for quality aspects of childcare investments. Early investments are expected not only to improve the development of innate productivity, but also to have a multiplier effect on later human capital investments.

The findings show that the policy rationales for introducing ECCE in Ethiopia were driven to avail education opportunities , to ensure quality child care policies and address the longstanding need of its citizens with regard to early childhood care and education. This explains why the idea of ECCE was convincing as a more meaningful tool and strategy to address the needs as well as to improve quality of education in Ethiopia. However, this policy even though 'need' driven marks a shift from "rhetoric to action" as this is the first time ever that direct support is provided to ECCE services. The ECCE policymakers narrated how they seized the opportunity to make a case to the government on how to go about ECCE matters and to have ECCE established in different government schools.

The findings also suggest that some of the key ECCE policymakers had knowledge and interest in children, which they felt it was on them to safeguard childcare issues. They reasoned that '*something*' could be done quickly

considering the opportunities and conducive environment the government is availing.

However, the introduction of the ECCE policy in Ethiopia has marked a significant shift towards achieving the 'access' and 'participation' agendas for all children at the preschool level. Consequently, according to the policymakers, the ECCE has created an opportunity to ensure children from poor families are provided with opportunities to attend school. This is also supported by the proponents of universal design of ECCE who acknowledges the importance of high quality educational experiences for all children (Darragh, 2007).

Though the ECCE may have come as a good initiative and with many critical challenges, the finding suggests that this initiative has become an important landmark achievement within the education sector in Ethiopia and remains indeed a highly welcomed and commended initiative.

4.1.2. Consultation process leading to ECCE

Consultations have taken place prior to the introduction of the ECCE and that these consultations were done with UNICEF, WCYAB Ministry of Health and other relevant organizations. Consultations were also necessary with these organizations to ensure that the ECCE will be widely accepted (CD, 2015). During the consultation some number of parliamentarians) had knowledge and interest in children (CD, 2015). It was also mentioned, they had Minister of Education on their side so he had intimate knowledge of the sector as well...so when this issue was coming down the line...he was very open to that [ECCE] (EP,2015) . Following the debates and consultations, the ECCE was approved and the policymakers described that 'as soon as they had the decision they consulted with the representative groups and over the core of the next few months...the

sector kind of vented its opinions to the representative groups' as a result of these consultations we were able to launch it (CD, 2015).

From the above responses it can be concluded that the policymakers emphasized that communication was fundamental during the decision-making process and the finalization of the ECCE policy. For this purpose consultation was carried out with concerned departments such as Ministry of Health and Women, Children and Youth Affairs Bureau. Dialogue and consultation also took place between the experts in the Childcare issues like UNICEF and key policy actors from other Departments, suggesting that the key ideas for the ECCE have been scrutinized and well argued for and against during these consultation processes.

The findings suggest that the ECCE policymakers conveyed their ideas of ECCE proposal firstly by way of 'coordinative discourse' in which they put these ideas across to the legislators and other core policy actors from other departments like the departments of Health, Women Children and Youth and so on for thorough scrutiny, evaluation and assessment. Through this interactive process the ideas, context, structure and agency play crucial parts in the outcome of the policymaking process.

4.2. Educators impressions of the ECCE policy

4.2.1. First impressions

The interview was done on January 20/2015 at *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE Center. Four individuals from *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE Center two ECCE educators, ECCE program coordinator and school director were interviewed. For the purpose of narrating the finding I have shortened their names in the analysis in the following way; and their responses are depicted as follows;

- ECCE Educators (EE)
- ECCE Program Coordinator (EC)
- School Director (SD)

When asked about their first impressions on the ECCE, the educators described;

That it was about time that something was done for children. They acknowledged the overall benefits of this new initiative for children and parents (SD, 2015). One of the ECCE educator's replied "I think it was great that [parents] didn't have to pay... preschool is expensive so I thought it would be good for parents" (EE, 2015). It is great that every child can get preschool for three years before they start school that is brilliant. And also they [children] get a chance to mix with others before they start primary school (EC, 2015).

4.2.2 How they came to know about the ECCE initiative

Four Individuals from *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center two ECCE educators and ECCE coordinator and Director were interviewed and their replies are summarized as follows;

The educators described that they first heard about the initiative from a meeting organized to aware them and the budget announcement. They felt that the initiative was introduced '*over night*' or as one educator pointed out, '*it was all very rushed at the start*'. No educator felt he/she was informed on time and they all noted that there was short period of time between the initial announcement and the actual implementation of the ECCE. They also described that the information provided were not clear from the beginning saying that the government were not sure of what they were doing. As one of the ECCE educator respondents stated, 'Unfortunately this is kind of like an experiment;

they are just going to see what works'. On top of that they described that parents were poorly informed about the eligibility criteria as they sought details directly from the ECCE settings. They expressed that there were many questions and uncertainties at the beginning stage of the ECCE.

From the above responses it can be concluded that government did not engage in the 'communicative discourse' with the ECCE educators. Overall, educators felt that government was not sure what they were doing and that the introduction of ECCE was some kind of trial to see whether it will be successful or not. This is supported by educators' statements highlighting that they were not clear why government introduced this new policy.

The educators' impressions on the ECCE were mixed as they described that it was about time something was done for children, but at the same time they noted that they were not sure why the initiative was introduced especially why government rushed the introduction of this new policy. This however, may be as a result of lack of communication between ECCE sector and the government during the designing stage, as findings already indicated that there was no consultation with the ECCE sector prior to the introduction of ECCE.

Findings on the issue of; implementation phase, recognition of qualification and experience, challenges of improving quality. Semi-structured interviews were used and responses were put in a collective form.

4.3 Implementation phase

4.3.1 Age Limit

Four Individuals from *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center two ECCE educators and ECCE coordinator and Director were interviewed and their replies are put as follows;

Some children might not fit in into the age bracket by a few days and then in the school [primary] everyone starts school when they are four years old so if somebody misses the ECCE by few days....that means that they are never going to get it (EC, 2015). One of the ECCE educators replied *every year some children miss out of having any ECCE even though they are entitled to it I have to tell the parents sorry I can't give you place because might be one day .It is a little bit unfair to the children that they will not get ECCE.* The educators noted that not every child have had access to ECCE due to the age defined category and they felt that the Department was not flexible regarding this matter as no exemptions were made. But also it was an opportunity to incentivize parents about sending their children to school when they are older. The policymakers described that the ECCE has opened peoples' minds to the idea that children learn before they go to school and I think it has paved a way for us to say that play is learning. We knew from the teachers that children were coming to school and were already educationally disadvantaged and they were falling behind from day one so the obvious good was to bring equality of opportunity for all children

The ECCE educators from the Yewereha Yekatit ECCE center noted that the higher age limit was very good as previously parents put their children in the primary school once they turn 4 years of age. They felt that as a result of ECCE children were starting school later and were going to primary school a little bit more mature and this as they said was also appreciated by the primary school teachers. All the interviewed educators felt the ECCE should be provided for all children not depending on any age bracket, some also suggested that it should become compulsory for every child.

One interesting finding that emerged from the interviews was that some children were not able to access the ECCE as they were outside of the age qualifying category. The educators noted that every year, some children miss out on ECCE

as a result of this rule and these children would not avail of this initiative as in the next academic year they are most likely to commence primary education. Nonetheless, this age defined category was maintained by policymakers as they believed also it was important to culture parents about more appropriate school starting age.

4.3.2. Recognition of qualification and experience

When asked about qualification and experiences of ECCE educators the school director and the ECCE coordinator replied;

According to the school director; teacher's qualifications are diversified. It is important to have training because before you could have half of the staff who would have training and half of staff would have none (EC, 2015). The coordinator further added I was delighted because I felt it was a step forward for our sector...our qualifications are kind of being noticed and...rewarded so instead of just being another childcare service or babysitter you are a recognized professional on the job...that is great.

Importantly, the school director and ECCE coordinator felt that the introduction of ECCE made them aware of the need and importance of upgrading their qualification, acknowledging it as something needed in order to work in the ECCE sector. In sum, Disparity within ECCE sector was reflected in qualification backgrounds of the ECCE workforce ranging anywhere between unqualified, partially qualified or qualified in areas not directly related to early childhood education.

4.4. Challenges of improving quality

4.4.1. Lack of resources

The interview was done on January 27 /2014. Accordingly, one policy maker at Ministry of Education Curriculum Department Bureau,CD and after that at *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE Center and four Individuals from *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center two ECCE educators and ECCE coordinator and Director were interviewed and their replies are put as follows;

Once they ensured that every eligible child has a place under the ECCE the 'next question they would have is what they are going to do so that children experiences are positive and they are of high quality'. So in order to address the issue of quality the policymakers introduced in the contract that every setting must address requirements stated in National Policy for ECCE in Ethiopia (2010) 'and that was really, really limited because they couldn't monitor it and they had very limited resources to support services and unfortunately they are still in that position they have very few resources to monitor or support what is happening in services' (CD, 2015). The educators *'were thinking that when the ECCE came in'* they will be given budgets to carry on the activities and improve the quality of their settings. However, they soon realized that this was not going to happen due to lack of resources. Two educators felt that a huge amount of work went into planning without anyone evaluating the quality of the work. Most of the educators argued that quality was improving as a result of their determination and motivation and not as a result of the ECCE. Nonetheless, they believed that with time and more resources the situation would improve.

Based on the collected data, bringing about quality in ECCE sector has been a huge challenge.

The findings in this research highlighted that there was a lack of resources towards supporting quality in the ECCE sector. Once the policymakers have established a place for every child eligible under ECCE, the focus then shifted to ensuring quality. ECCE educators as well as policymakers' narrated that resources towards improving quality are still limited. In a nutshell, regulating quality can be difficult as resources have to be availed before being monitored for quality provision.

4.5 Interview with *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center staff

Below are FGD conducted on Feb 2/2015 at *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE Center with *Kirkos* Sub-city Education Bureau representative, school director, ECCE coordinator, two ECCE educators and two care takers on *Yewereha Yekaktit* ECCE Experience and I have summarized the main discussion points as follows;

For the purpose of narrating the finding I have shortened their names in the analysis in the following way;

- ECCE Educators (EE)
- ECCE Program Coordinator (EC)
- School Director (SD)
- Sub-City Education Bureau Representative (SE)

4.5.1 Holistic Child Development

Early years of life is the most critical period of human development. This is a time when mental stimulation, nutrition, and emotional attachment all work together to shape their identity, coping skills, intelligence and problem solving abilities needed to help them grow into healthy, intelligent and positively adjusted adults. The extent to which these processes lead to healthy development depends upon the qualities of stimulation and support, and in their social

environments. Given that the foundations of good health, personality and intellectual development are established during the early childhood years, this is precisely the time when children need the most care and support. Thus, appropriate ECCE programs are thus crucial to address the 'holistic' developmental needs of children. Cognizant to the above stated philosophy, *Yewereha Yekaktit* has been upholding model ECCE program integral into the local government school. Running ECCE in government schools is a new phenomenon emerged after the formulation of ECCE policy very recently. Hence, given the limited experience in the sector, challenges and drawbacks in the intervention process are inevitable. However, with a backup support from MCDP, the program demonstrated the following good lessons and outcomes which are worth sharing;

a) Learning on a Full Stomach

Young children, when they can, feed nearly all the time. This is the right thing because at his stage, their bodies and brains are growing exponentially. Unfortunately, due to unfavorable socio-economic conditions among many families in the community a healthy meal for many children is a pipedream. Sadly, without proper nutrition, their growth is impaired, reducing their ability to concentrate and learn effectively in school. *Yewereh Yekatit* in collaboration with a local NGO called MCDP, therefore, initiated school feeding program supported by parents and the school. Parents and guardians of children in the ECCE, take turns in preparing food (breakfast) for children at the ECCE center while, cooking materials and food items are supported by MCDP. Parents also assist teachers in looking after the children during play times while spending at the ECCE center. Another good experience observed in this program is the linkage created in school feeding

program with parents (savings and credit members) supplying food items to the school. Some women (parents of ECCE enrolled children) who are running small business with credit support from MCDP are supplying food items such as home baked bread and fruits to the center.

Running ECCE has created a double fold advantage to the target children. Firstly, it has created access to vulnerable children who, otherwise, had little chance of getting age appropriate early child hood education. Secondly, integration of school feeding program has significantly contributed to retain their attendance and motivation for education.

b) Capacity building of ECCE educators and strengthening ECCE center

Refresher trainings provided for ECCE teachers have proven effect in transforming their approach from conventional Kindergarten style to the ECCE in providing age appropriate service to the children in the local context. Renovation and furnishing the center with play and cognitively stimulating materials have considerably contributed to the successful achievement of the center. Tangible evidence in this regard is the recent award received by the school from the Addis Ababa Administration, winning a model ECCE program title in the *Woreda*. Being a model center, it has become a focal point of learning and sharing of experience for other schools in the *Woreda*. Recognitions given by the government to the school in this regard would profoundly enhance sustainability of ECCE program.

During the interview director of *Yewereha Yekatit* said "I dare say that it wouldn't have been possible to win the award without the coordination of ECCE educators and care takes. It has attracted government officials to work with us and creating fertile ground for future sustainability of the program." (SC,2015).

c) According to, *Kirkos Sub City, Education Office*, despite the school initiated ECCE with the directive form regional administration; the center had many gaps to fully function in line with the procedures and ECCE policy of the country. These gaps have been attempted to be bridged by *Yewereha Yekakitit* to ensure sustainable function of the center.

d) Smooth transition and enrollment of ECCE children in primary schools

One of the outcomes of ECCE program is enhancing smooth transition of children into primary school. In this regard, children who are attending the ECCE at the center will have better chance of joining primary schools with heightened interest for education and with bright cognitive/intellectual readiness and optimum self-confidence. These conditions would undoubtedly bolster their academic performance in the school. Experiences have witnessed that children passed through effective ECCE programs would perform better than those who do not (Ratson, 2008). Such an outcome is mainly attributed to the fact that children at this formative stage would get exposure to all rounded stimulation for language, physical, mental and psycho-social domains of their development. Thus, this approach gives a good lesson by demonstrating ECCE that as one of the most crucial mechanisms to boost quality of education in the country.

e) Challenges encountered while implementing ECCE activities

According to the *Yewereha Yekakitit* ECCE coordinator, challenges encountered while implementing activities are the following; children with disabilities don't have access, lack of adequate budgetary provisions, and high demand from the community to extend the program so that more children could be enrolled and there is lack of children books, toys and other relevant educational materials.

The above finding indicates that although there have been significant successes in implementing ECCE, there remain significant challenges in ensuring that service is of adequate quality. The challenge of matching policy aspirations with financial investment is highlighted by the fourth ESDP, which covers the period 2010 to 2014. It aims for an increase in the GER in pre-school to 20 percent by 2014 (Ministry of education 2010e: 29). However, ECCE has a share of only 0.06 percent of the total budget for ESDP IV, which is around 115 billion birr. This share is entirely allocated to federal and regional government support, with no individual line items for teacher training, provision of materials, operating costs or teacher salaries. To sum up, if greater accessibility and quality of ECCE service delivery are ensured it has the potential to support learning achievement when children reach primary school.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

This final chapter will conclude by revisiting the key objectives of this research and make recommendations for further research and policy improvement.

This research aimed to explore the introduction of ECCE for children between three to seven years of age in Ethiopia. The main purpose was to document the perspectives of policymakers and early childhood educators on this new policy initiative. The key concern identified at the start of this research was that the introduction of ECCE is relatively a recent phenomenon and studies in this area have been limited and scarce, thus exploratory study into this topic was identified as important and relevant. The research design was delimited to ECCE policy, quality service delivery and ECCE implementation with particular emphasis to *Yewereha Yekaktit's* experience. These dimensions were elaborated through literature in areas of pathways of ECCE in Ethiopia and the National policy for ECCE. This empirically drive research sought to explore the policy rationale behind the ECCE and the challenges related to its implementation. It also attempted to give an insight into the impact of this new policy on the ECCE sector. In order to explore the key issues under study and be able to accomplish the objectives of this research, qualitative interviewing was adopted to generate data. The first core objective of this research was to explore the rationale behind the introduction of the ECCE and to evaluate its implementation process. The findings uncovered tend to suggest that the ECCE in Ethiopia was introduced as a consequence of addressing longstanding needs. It is however important to note that even though the rationale for ECCE was driven by need; it was also driven

by few policymakers who had knowledge and professional interest in the area of ECCE in Ethiopia.

Both policymakers and educators were confronted with several challenges throughout the implementation process of ECCE. One of the challenges was lack of resources particularly financial to provide holistic development or address all requirements stated in the policy (2010). This was evident in terms of data finding of *Yewereha Yekaktit* ECCE experience. Furthermore, regarding the experiences of early childhood educators about the new policy changes and how these changes may have impacted on the quality of ECCE services. The findings from *Yewereha Yekakti* experience suggest that they have attempted to address all issues as stated in the policy (2010) still more needs to be done and role of the government and stakeholders in quality assurance of ECCE needs clarification and strengthening.

In conclusion, this research has illustrated that the introduction of Early Childhood Education and Care is a good initiative. However, the most recent landmark development has been the launching of ECCE centers in different government schools in 2010, through which all children between three to six years of age for the first time were offered preschool classes prior to starting primary school. This research concludes that ECCE signifies a landmark development in the area of education in Ethiopia and that with its implementation as well as inter alia concomitant policies on assuring quality service delivery standard that 'education' with 'childcare' now drives ECCE policy agendas and innovations. Moreover, despite its need driven rationale, this new ECCE initiative has marked a significant movement towards more unified sector. There is also an opportunity for government to develop and support this initiative, to ensure quality early childhood education experiences within caring environment that is delivered by experienced educators.

Based on the crucial findings that have been uncovered and discussed in this research, it is plausible to say that the new ECCE policy is now firmly in the road to effective regulation and monitoring. The research therefore draws a tentative conclusion that with the recent introduction of ECCE is representative of affirmative actions towards ensuring access and participation all children to preschool as well as addressing issues of quality provision through regulating and standardization and adherence to the policy (2010) through collaboration between concerned stakeholders. These latest development are in line with the Growth and Transformation Plan 2010. And this will influence future policy thinking within the ECCE sector in Ethiopia.

5.2. Recommendation for future research

This section will highlight a number of key recommendations towards issues of quality improvement for ECCE sector. Further research is also needed at this critical time to ascertain the level of quality, practice and outcomes associated with different versions of ECCE providers whose methods and philosophical approaches of providing services to children tend to differ. This is an important issue given that the introduction of ECCE policy one would expect should be able to address disparity of practice, quality and outcomes across board. Very importantly, there is an urgent need to carry out a national evaluation of the ECCE initiative so far in Ethiopia, in order to determine whether this initiative and associated policies impact positively on children's early experiences and whether 'learning and developmental' outcomes are achieved. Expanding access to pre-school program because it will enhance the quality of education and improving the internal efficiency of primary schools and also enhances children's chances of success in the education system. Early childhood care and development requires an integrated approach involving effective coordination of complementary activities. ECCE programs should be able to address the

cognitive, psychosocial, cognitive health and safety of young children. Role of the government and stakeholders in quality assurance of ECCE needs clarification and strengthening.

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Appendix one

Letter to the management in the Early Childhood Education and Care Center

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am in my final year of MA in social work at Indira Gandhi New Open University here based in Addis at Saint Mary University. As a part of my studies I am required to conduct a piece of research for which I have chosen to look at the recent introduction of the ECCE in Ethiopia. In 2010 the Ethiopian government introduced the ECCE initiative for children between three to six years of age. I have identified a need for research into this important scheme under the topic: **Initiative on ECCE as a tool to improve quality of Education.**

I would like to ask if it is possible to recruit participants for my research from your early childhood education center. I have attached description of the research and what is involved in it for the potential participants. The information gained from the interviews will remain confidential and your name. I hope that you find my attached description interesting and worthy enough to inspire you to participate. It will be interesting to hear your valuable experience on the issue of ECCE and the invaluable contribution of your participation in this research. Please feel free to contact me, should you require any further information. Many thanks for taking time to read this and I hope to hear from you soon.

Regards,

Hamelmal Yohannes(251-9-1-17-58-02)

Appendix two

Description of the research

Dear Sir/Madam,

The research titled: Initiative on ECCE as a tool to improve quality of education aims to explore the perspectives of early childhood educators and policymakers regarding the introduction of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) initiative. It seeks to understand and analyze these perceptions within the broader Ethiopian ECCE policy context with particular focus on the implementation of Your school specifically *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE implementation experience , the policy and how these relate to issues of quality provision and impact in the education center in Ethiopia. The research also has interrelated core objectives: Firstly, to explore the implementation of the ECCE initiative so far. Secondly, to understanding the impact of the new policy for those working with the children.

In order to fulfill the key objectives of the research I have decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with early childhood educators to gain an insight into their perceptions and experiences on the ECCE initiative. These semi-structured interviews will be conducted with participants working on ECCE program. These participants are selected from your school center will be; two ECCE educators, two care takers and school director and ECCE coordinator will be interviewed. The semi-structured interviews will be recorded. Importantly all information gained from the semi-structured interviews would remain confidential and your name made anonymous. In addition observation of the ECCE center and FGD will also be applied.

Appendix 3

Guide for semi-structured interviews with policymakers

The introduction of ECCE initiative

1. Can you tell me how did the ECCE come about?
2. How was the initiative introduced to ECCE sector?
3. What was the initial reaction from schools?
4. What were the key challenges in implementing the ECCE?
5. Were there any challenges for ECCE services to comply with qualification requirements?
6. How was quality of ECCE services ensured and monitored under the National Framework for ECCE services?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 4

Question guide for semi-structured interviews with ECCC coordinator, school director and ECCE educators and sub-city education Bureau

Questions guidelines

1. Can you tell me how long have you been working in this school?
2. What is your qualification background?
3. How did you first hear about the ECCE initiative?
4. When you first heard about the ECCE what your first impression was?
5. Explain how the ECCE programs are conducted and has this initiative impacted on the quality of the service?
6. How do you monitor ECCE program?
7. Challenges encountered, remedial solutions sought and lessons learnt while implementing ECCE
8. *Yewereha Yekatit* is regarded as a model ECCE center to other schools. How did that come about?
9. Observations made before and after the introduction of ECCE?
10. What are impacts/outcomes gained out of implementing ECCE
11. What were the drawbacks/limitations you faced in the course of implementation? What measures were taken to reverse the challenges?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to mention, that we have not yet talked about?

Appendix 5

List of Interviewed Individuals

Ministry of Education

- 1. Hawaz Tsegaye Curriculum Development Department Head**
- 2. Assefa Mekonen Monitoring and Evaluation Officer**
- 3. Solomon Shiferaw Education Sector Development Head**
- 4. Twedoros Habte educational policy Development Department Representative**

Yewereha Yekatit ECCE Center

- 1. Halemichael Beyene School Director**
- 2. Endale Assefa ECCE Program Coordinator**
- 3. Dawit Daniel ECCE Educator**
- 4. Rahel Atnafu ECCE Educator**
- 5. Bogalech Seifu Care taker**
- 6. Azalech bayu Care Taker**

Sub-city Education Bureau Representative

- 1. Ephrem Alemu**

INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

**Initiative on Early Childhood Care and Education as a tool
to improve the quality of education:**

The case of Woreha Yekatit School located in Kirkos Subcity *Woreda* 4

BY: Hamelmal Yohannes Abraham

**A Research proposal Submitted to Indira Gandhi National
Open University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for The Degree of Master in Social Work.**

Advisor: Abera Degefa (PhD)

October 18/2014

**Proforma for submission of MSW Project Proposal for Approval
from Academic Counselor at Study Center**

Enrollment no. I.D 1217086

Date of Submission: October 18/2014

Name of the Study Center: St.Mary University College

Name of the Guide: Abera Degefa (PHD)

Title of the Project: Initiative on Early Childhood Care and Education as a tool to
improve the quality of education: The Case of Yewereha Yekatit School located in
Kirkos Sub-city Woreda 4

Signature of the Student:

Approved/not approved:

Signature:

Name & Address of student: Hamelmal Yohannes

Cell Phone: 09-11-17-58-02

Name & address of Guide:

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Acronyms

ECCE Early Childhood Care and Education

EFA Education for All

GER General Enrollment Rate

MDGs Millennium Development Goals

MCDP Mission for Community Development Program

MoE Ministry of Education

WCYAB Women Children and Youth Affairs Bureau

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organization

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

Introduction

In the human life cycle, the early childhood period is a critical period that requires due attention and a great deal of investment. Failing to provide children at this stage of development with better nutrition, health care and education deprives them of their right to develop as productive citizens, enjoy a better quality of life and eventually contribute to society's growth. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programs for children from prenatal to seven years of age, their parents and caregivers (MoE 2010).

Strong early childhood foundations, including good health, nutrition and nurturing environment helps to ensure a smooth transition to primary school and a better chance of completing basic education successfully (UNESCO 2010). Further it is stated that, early childhood education and care provides one of the few effective policy means of increasing social and economic opportunities for disadvantaged communities and, therefore, for society as a whole (UNESCO 2010). Based on costs-benefits an analysis of ECCE programs to increase equity, the UNESCO conference report demonstrates the better equipped a child is at the start, the more effective his or her education in school will be. ECCE works as a 'multiplier' of collective investments in the school system.

Early Childhood Care and Education is one of the most neglected areas in Ethiopia. The early childhood enrollment rate in 2007/2008 is about 3.9%, nationally negligible figure (MOE 2010). In the last few years, the private sector in the urban centers has shown a growing interest in investing in early childhood education, particularly in Addis Ababa. This opportunity, however, is only accessible for the very few children coming from well-to-do families.

In 2010, in collaboration with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Ethiopian government designed a national framework for ECCE that includes ideas from many innovative low-cost programs in the rest of Africa. The new Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy Framework is built around four pillars. The first two pillars parental education and a comprehensive program of early child health and stimulation focus on children from the prenatal period to age three and fall under the Health Ministry. The third and fourth pillars are more targeted at children aged four to six. The third pillar - non-formal school readiness - consists primarily of the initiation of Child-to-Child initiatives, through which Grade 6 children act as facilitators in a program of play designed to improve school readiness. The fourth pillar is the establishment of pre-schools of various kinds, including community-based pre-schools, private pre-schools and pre-schools attached to primary schools. In sum, it aims to address children's needs for education, health and nutrition in an integrated fashion

through collaboration between the Ministries of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs, Education, and Health. (MoE 2010)

Having noted the benefits of ECCE, the prevailing situation in Ethiopia and the recently developed National Policy Framework on ECCE. I hope this thesis will contribute to pin point the current practice in ECCE with particular emphasis to *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center and a movement from rhetoric toward actions that increasingly incorporate quality into ECCE programmes and their evaluations.

Overview of *Yeworeha Yekatit* ECCE center

Running ECCE in government schools is a new phenomenon emerged after the formulation of ECCE policy very recently. Accordingly, *Yewereha Yekatit* Elementary Government School, located in *Kirkos-subcity* established ECCE program in 2011 and have been operating since. The total number of ECCE enrolled children is 120. The ECCE center provides the children with a morning snack of home baked bread and tea. The school has organized the parents to come and prepare the tea and serve the children with the snack. The mothers take turns according to set schedule for feeding the children. The children who stay most of the day at school also bring lunch boxes from home to eat for lunch. The school in collaboration with a local NGO called MCDP has constructed kitchen and ceilings for four classrooms; has purchased and supplied kerosene stoves and kitchen utensils and drinking cups; it also provides on regular basis consumable items like kerosene and cleaning materials; has provided four metal shelves for placing teaching aid materials and dolls; has supplied a TV set and DVD player for children to watch various edutainment videos; and the teachers have attended capacity building training. Refresher trainings provided for ECCE teachers have proven effect in transforming their approach from conventional kindergarten style to the ECCE in providing age appropriate service to the children in the local context. Parents of the children have on their own initiative built a shade that serves as dining room for the children. The teachers also due to lack of staff room have built a small provisional shade from discarded construction materials. But it is worth noting that the school has already allocated an additional classroom for the ECCE that is being converted to a staff room. Renovation and furnishing the center with play and cognitively stimulating materials have considerably contributed to the successful achievement of the center. Tangible evidence in this regard is the recent award received by the school from the Addis Ababa Administration, winning a model ECCE program title in the *Woreda*. Being a model center, it has become a focal point of learning and sharing of experience for other schools in the *Woreda*.

Problem statement:

Early Childhood Care and Education supports children's survival, growth, development and learning, including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and

emotional development – from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal and non formal settings (UNESCO Education For All - Global Monitoring Report 2007). The early years represent the most vulnerable time in the individual human development. It is of course, the best time for ensuring “strong foundations” for later learning and life chances. Early Childhood Care and Education is the foundation of:

- Social inclusion and equality in life chances;
- Cognitive, social, physical and emotional development of the individual
- Respect of the basic individual human rights

Having stated the above, recently a policy has been developed to address the longstanding need of its citizens with regard to early childhood care and education. Regardless challenges are faced by ECCE centers and ECCE educators as well. Although *Yewereha Yekakitit* ECCE center have attempted to render quality service delivery as stated in the policy but did not achieve it fully. Due to the fact that ECCE is a relatively recent phenomenon, existing research on this subject remains scanty and limited.

Objectives

General Objective: This thesis aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of policy makers at MoE, early childhood educators of *Yewereha Yekakitit* as well as the perspectives of local government regarding the introduction of Early Childhood care and Education initiative in Ethiopia. It seeks to understand and analyze these perspectives within the broader Ethiopia ECCE policy context with particular focus on the implementation of ECCE at *Woreha Yekakitit* School and how this relates to issues of quality provision within the ECCE sector in Ethiopia.

The research also has interrelated core (specific) objectives:

- Firstly, to evaluate the implementation process of the ECCE policy as well as exploring the rationale behind the ECCE initiative.
- Secondly, to examine the impacts the newly introduced ECCE policy has on the perception of those working directly with children under the preschool settings participating in the ECCE program at *YewerehaYekakitit* ECCE center.
- Thirdly, to explore the experiences of *Yewereha Yekakitit* early childhood educators about ECCE policy and how this policy is impacting on the quality of services as well as shaping the movement towards improvement in the quality of education.

Research Questions

The current research is guided by the following research questions:

6. What are the perspectives of key policymakers on the thinking behind the ECCE initiative?
7. What was the rationale behind the ECCE initiative?
8. What are the perspectives of *Woreha Yekatit* ECCE educators on the introduction of ECCE?
9. Challenges encountered by ECCE educators while implementing ECCE policy?
10. How does this new initiative impacts on quality of education?

Universe of the study

The study will focus on those individuals responsible in designing ECCE policy and those who are involved in implementing it such as (*Woreda* level Women, Children's, Youth Affairs Bureau, Education bureau at sub-city level, *Woreda* level and ECCE educators of *Yewereha Yekaktit* and school principals.

Methodology

A qualitative method will be employed in exploring wide range of perspectives from various sources. Data will be explored and analyzed qualitatively to develop clear understanding about the overall implementation of the program, on lessons learnt and challenges encountered in the process of designing, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the ECCE and how it is assumed as a tool to improve the quality of education. In short, using a combination of different methods will meaningfully enhance capturing wide range of data for this thesis.

The data sources for the study on ECCE will be:

MoE relevant staff (higher officials responsible in designing the ECCE policy), *Yewereha Yekaktit* ECCE educators, school principals, local authorities such as; *Sub-city Education Bureau*.

Instruments (study Tools)

In order to explore and identify overview on ECCE, structured tools will be used to serve as a guide for in-depth individual interviews with ECCE educators and other key informants. The designing of the tools proceeded with discussions to have shared understanding on the general conceptual frameworks of ECCE. Each instrument involved questions from the key elements of ECCE in assessing impact of (system of operation and outcomes). Using qualitative, individual interviews, and observations, extensive qualitative information will be generated to produce thematically organized information about the overall performance

of ECCE implementation at *Yewereha Yekatit* ECCE center and eventually meet the purpose of this thesis.

Data Collection

a) In-depth Interview

In order to elicit and capture views, attributions and perceptions of stakeholders, on ECCE project, structured and flexible interviews will be conducted with key informants and partners of the organization. One-on-one discussions will be held with *Yewereha Yekaktit* school principals, ECCE educators, Sub city and *Woreda* Officials, MoE staff.

b) Observations

As part and parcel of the data gathering techniques, direct observation also will provide firsthand information to learn about the accomplishment of *Yewereha Yekaktit* ECCE center and its successful and sustainable impacts on the children. Site visits will be made to see the ongoing activities of the ECCE center, and documentation of information at the office.

c) Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussion will be held with school principal, ECCE educators to get their perspectives about the overall achievements of ECCE program focusing on the changes attained so far. About 6-8 persons will take part in each FGD session. Every discussion session will be facilitated by the student in collaboration with one of the assigned program staff's.

Data analysis and documenting results

Data obtained from different tools will be examined and categorized into various themes. Using manual coding methods of qualitative analysis, discussions will be sorted out considering common views and reflections of the respondents in line with ECCE implementation.

Significance of the study

ECCE has been acknowledged by research as beneficial for children and the society in general, thus research into the ECCE is of utmost importance in order to monitor its success and future development. This research contributes unique knowledge into regarding the timing of strategic interventions and investments within ECCE sector by state governments. This research has been designed to address some of these key issues by exploring the current introduction of ECCE and the implications of this new initiative within the education sector in Ethiopia both from the early childhood educators' , the policymakers'

and also other relevant officials perspectives so as to inform effective future policy in this area.

Chapterization

- The first chapter of this thesis introduces the key aims and objectives, followed by the background information into ECCE in Ethiopia leading to the issues of policy development and recent introduction of the ECCE. In addition, the chapter features the rationale behind this research, research questions and method adopted in generating the data. The significance and limitations of this research thesis are also presented in the first chapter.
- The second chapter will present the reviews on literature around issues of improving quality of education, ECCE policy quality, and other relevant issues.
- The third chapter will state analyses the key methodological standing and the justification for the method applied to the data collection. The chapter also presents the chosen sample in this research and elaborates on the rationale for its preferred respondents group. It also will provide the background information of participants as well as ethical considerations.
- The fourth chapter will address the key findings from the data. These findings will be structured into emerging themes and some of the participants' key responses will be presented in this chapter.
- The fifth and final chapter will discuss the findings in the light of the literatures reviewed in this research. The chapter will also provide the tentative conclusions as well as recommendations for further research.

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