

Original Research Article

Beliefs and Practices of Teachers about Developmental Appropriateness of Early Childhood Care and Education Provisions in Selected Centers at Adama Administrative Town

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' experiences concerning teachers' beliefs and practices about DAP in their instructional activities in Early Childhood Education programs in Adama Town. Qualitative multiple case study was employed to collect data using unstructured interviews, observations, and document scrutiny. The participants of the study were nine early childhood care and education (ECCE) teachers purposefully selected in this study (three each from private, faith-based, and government centers). Interview records and observation field notes were transcribed, coded, categorized, and developed into themes within and across cases. The findings are presented under three overarching themes that reveal teachers' beliefs about and execution of DAP in the preschools including teachers' beliefs guide practice; Teaching strategies; and reflected upon challenges to DAP. The study revealed that teachers had a moderate belief toward DAP but their classroom practices were developmentally inappropriate/ inconsistent with their beliefs. The teachers' classroom practices were influenced by environmental factors than their beliefs such as high academic expectation from parents, the constraint of teaching materials, play equipment, budget, lack of suitable learning environment, limited knowledge and pedagogical skills, and stakeholders' collaboration. Lastly, the implications of this study for the ECCE stakeholders were suggested.

Keywords: DAP, ECCE, Teachers' beliefs and practice.

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INTRODUCTION

The research revealed that teachers adhering to a developmentally appropriate philosophy of teaching and learning focus on the overall development of the child and meeting the individual needs of the children in the group. Developmentally appropriate classrooms allow for many opportunities for child choice-making, problem-based learning, and critical thinking activities. Play is highly valued as an opportunity for learning in the developmentally appropriate classroom. Curriculum content is integrated throughout classroom activities and small group activities are favored over whole group instruction (McMullen, 1997).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the world's largest organization working on behalf of young children (2008), provides a

framework for describing the beliefs and practices of early childhood educators. This framework, known as Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), is a set of guidelines that can be used to help teachers make decisions about the best way to teach young children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006).

Teachers' beliefs play a central role in teachers' decisions, judgments, and behaviors in their teaching process, influencing various aspects of teaching, including pedagogical decision making; what approaches, techniques, and classroom activities are adopted; and how learners should be chosen and evaluated (Birello, 2012; Ertmer, 2005; Pajares, 1992). Teachers' beliefs are considered the strongest predictor of teaching behavior (Pajares, 1992). Previous studies have focused on what teachers believe and what teachers do in their classroom practice, and revealed

both consistency and inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices (e.g., Phipps & Borg, 2009; Thomas & Jessica, 2014). Many factors have been reported to contribute to the variations of teachers' beliefs, including teachers, learners, materials, and contextual factors (Beets *et al.*, 2008).

The Government of Ethiopia has shown a growing interest in improving the quality of ECCE programmes offered in early childhood education centres. This is reflected in the government's Education Sector Development Programme V (ESDP-V) MoE (2015) and ECCE National Policy Framework, a strategic, operational plan and guideline for ECCE which the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MoE) developed in collaboration with the MoH and the MoWA. The vision is to ensure that all children have a healthy start in life, are nurtured in a safe, caring and stimulating environment and develop to their fullest potential (MoE, MoH & the MoWA, 2010).

This study is important for several reasons. First, no research has been cited, about teachers' beliefs and practices regarding DAP in ECCE settings in Adama Town. This study may be considered the first to research this topic in the area. Second, the majority of ECCE teachers are a one-year certificate after tenth-grade completion. As such, there is a need to explore their beliefs and practices about DAP. In addition, there is a need to identify the factors that influence their classroom practices. Results of the study are assumed to have significance for policy-makers and practitioners in the field in Adama Town to inform decisions and provide insight to undertake further related to the topic in a broader context. The following questions guided the study:

1. How do ECCE teachers describe their beliefs and practices regarding developmentally appropriate teaching practices in private, faith-based, and government centers in terms of:
 - 1.1. Planning the curriculum to attain important goals?
 - 1.2. Teaching to enhance development and learning?
 - 1.3. Assessing children's learning and development
2. What discouraging and/or encouraging factors are there for ECCE teachers in implementing developmentally appropriate beliefs in the centers?

METHODS

For this research, a qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it can enable a greater understanding of how do ECCE teachers describe their beliefs and practice regarding developmentally appropriate teaching practices for children learning and development. The multiple case studies were employed to explore the experiences of teachers' beliefs and practices about DAP in private, government, and faith-based centers. Specifically, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore how nine ECCE teachers reflected on their beliefs and practice about DAP in three settings in Adama Town. In addition, it was

conducted to help gain a deeper knowledge about the perceptions and experiences that teachers have when they work to explore and understand the participants' current and active experiences and reflection of DAP and how their beliefs and convictions are put into teaching practice.

The study Area Context

The study was conducted in Adama Town, formerly served as a capital city of Oromia regional state, in nine ECCE centers that were selected via a purposeful sampling strategy Creswell (2012) to include three from private, three from government, and three from faith-based settings. Specifically, three of the selected private centers had more than 1000 children, three of the government centers had about 500 children, and three faith-based centers had more than 1000 children. All of the centers did not have a special needs educator to provide services for children who have special needs. Also, it did not have learning centers such as computer lab, science area, library, art area, drama area, and music centers. The centers' physical characteristics also differed from one another in terms of layout. Finally, the centers did not set their vision, mission, value, and goals for children learning and development.

The first case consisted of three private settings, which were not formerly established for the ECCE center, rather for another purpose. So, the indoor and outdoor learning environments were not suitable for children's freely movement during the individual, small and whole-group activities. Two of the centers used the Amharic language as the medium of instruction, but one of the centers also used both Afan Oromo and Amharic language as the media of instruction. The first and the second centers had the only center that was providing services for kindergarten-aged children. The third setting was in the same center as a primary school with the first cycle but separated by a fence. The program was a full-day program.

The second case consisted of three faith-based ECCE settings. The first, second and third centers were run by Orthodox Church, Muslim Mosque and Catholic Church respectively. The first and the second centers had in the same center as a primary school but separated by a fence. The third setting was the only center that was providing services for kindergarten-aged children and has a comfortable learning environment. Moreover, it was used Amharic language as a medium of instruction for children learning and development except center two, which used Afan Oromo as a medium of instruction. The program was a full-day program.

The third case consisted of three government ECCE settings. While the two centers had provided services for children with age group 4-6 the so-called normal. The third center was an inclusive setting which

provided services for children with special needs and children without disability for their learning and development. All of the three centers used both Afan Oromo and Amharic language as a medium of instruction for children learning and development. The program was a half-day program.

Participants

A total of nine preschool teachers were selected purposively from each of the three types of ECE centers: private, faith-based, and government as depicted in Table 1 below. The criteria used for selecting the study participants included having at least qualification of certificate in ECCE, availability of children with special needs in the classroom, and voluntary participation and consent.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the study participants

Type of Center	Number of centers	Teachers				
		No	Sex	Age	Work Experience in years	Qualification in ECCE
Private	3	1	F	35	12	Certificate
		1	F	28	6	Certificate
		1	F	51	25	Certificate
Faith-based	3	1	F	50	21	Certificate
		1	F	40	8	Certificate
		1	F	33	9	Certificate
Government	3	1	F	22	3	Certificate
		1	F	23	3	Certificate
		1	F	24	3	Certificate

Data Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data was started immediately after the first interview was conducted and all the recorded data were transcribed verbatim. Not to expose the identities of the participants, pseudonyms T1, T2, T3, etc were used. Then, the audio recordings and observation field notes were carefully transcribed. Then, the data were analyzed iteratively: first, the transcribed data was read and re-read several times to get a sense of the whole, meaning units and themes were sought, compared, and contrasted across and within cases. The qualitative data were examined for relevance and meaningfulness of Dependability,

credibility, transformability, and crosschecked by the researcher to maintained trustworthiness.

RESULTS

In line with this, the data was obtained through the interview, observation, and documentary materials to code, condense and categorize into themes and subtheme to emerge the three themes such as teacher’s beliefs guide their practice, teaching strategies, and reflection on the challenges of DAP and five subthemes: planning the curriculum to attain important goals, teaching to enhance learning and development, assessing children’s learning and development and professional development/or training (see Table 2).

Table 2: Themes and subthemes of DAP beliefs and practice across the three cases

Themes	Sub-themes
Teachers’ beliefs guide practice	-The objectives of ECCE(ECCE philosophy) -Teaching through play-based learning
Teaching Strategies	-Planning the curriculum to attain important goals -Teaching to enhance learning and development -Assessing children’s learning and development -Professional development/or training
Reflected upon challenges to DAP	-Limited parental awareness -Limited teachers knowledge and pedagogical skills -No assistant teacher, a half-day program in government settings -Large size of the classroom

DISCUSSION

Teachers’ Beliefs Guide Practices

Under this theme, the objectives and focusing on play-based learning were identified as sub-themes that teachers’ beliefs guide their practice in private, faith-based, and government settings. Also, when two

or more teachers shared common beliefs, each one had her way to practice that belief in the classroom. Even teacher had their own specific beliefs that guided their practice.

In private settings, the participants revealed that teachers had limited knowledge and pedagogical

skills on how to plan the curriculum for whole child development (cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and physical) through child-initiated activities. Also, the teachers had inadequate pre-service and in-service training that affect the understandings of the theory underpinning DAP which influences their beliefs and practice. Furthermore, the teachers might have influenced by school leaders and parents to focus in their planning on academic skills through teachers dominated approach to ready children for primary school academic skills. The results of the study indicate that those teachers who were working in private centers were more tend to practice the contrast of DAP, which means inconsistent beliefs and practices in their DAP. In contrast to the previous studies were also revealed by (Birello, 2012; Ertmer, 2005; Pajares, 1992).

The children's personalities are developed through caring and education; however, in some private ECCE centers, teachers directly focus on the academic skills rather than giving attention to holistic development since they overlook the care aspect from their ECCE program.....PT3

In faith-based settings, school leaders and board had limited awareness about how to set the curriculum goals for children whole development. Even though teachers had limited knowledge and skills in setting ECCE goals, they were focused on both care and academic skills which were implemented both child-centered and teacher-directed teaching practice in their classrooms. Also, they were more practice to nurture the children's holistic development through play-based learning using a variety of teaching strategies like store telling, blocks, puzzles, and sing songs through play using hands-on experiences. Nevertheless, there were some variations among teachers in their practices during classroom activities. Furthermore, some of the teachers were motivated to practice the child-centered teaching strategies for children's social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and physical development. Hence, the majority of them have used both child-centered and teacher-directed teaching strategies for children learning and development that seems a kind of an integrated approach. These findings are comparable with (Beets *et al.*, 2008).

ECCE is introducing a child to the world of school, to build each child's self-esteem, to make friends, and to have plenty of opportunities for social interaction...FT1

Children at this age are concrete learners who need to see, touch, taste, smell, and hear everything." She believes that children learn by doing and that they need to be active participants in the learning activities...FT3

In government ECCE centers, even though the program was creating an opportunity for school readiness for children whose families have low-income economic status. It was very challenging to say the teachers properly planned, organized, and set goals for children all domain development. Since the program

was fragmented, teachers had limited knowledge and pedagogical skills lacked teaching materials, limited budget, and stakeholders' collaboration for children learning and development through play-based learning using hands-on experiences from locally available materials. However, as much as possible the teachers were trying their best to ready children for a primary school in supporting the children to identify alphabet letters, read, write, draw, and numeracy. The result reported that the teachers were leaner towards practicing DIP through teachers-dominated activities using whole group instruction. The findings are comparable with (Belay, 2018; McMullen *et al.*, 2006; Kim *et al.*, 2005 and Tirussew *et al.*, 2009).

The purpose of ECCE is to help our children's school readiness for primary school academic skills development and to support them to understand their environment...GT1, 2, & 3

Play-based Learning

In private centers, some of the teachers were providing support for children in their holistic development through play-based learning uses like sing-song, store telling, puzzles, blocks, and create an interactive environment to discipline and develop social skills using the existing locally available teaching materials. They were also trying their best to teach children through play using different strategies, but some of the centers have crowded indoor and outdoor learning environment which was not formerly established for children learning and development through play-based learning using hands-on experience. Moreover, they did not have learning centers, playgrounds, and an interactive learning environment for children free movement and small group and whole-group activities to explore their environment. The previous study was supported these findings by (Beets *et al.*, 2008).

On the other hand in faith-based centers, some of them had a Montessori classroom, interactive learning environment, and collaboration of stakeholders for children learning and development through play-based learning using hands-on experience. In addition, teachers had been facilitating indoor and outdoor activities through play-based learning for children free movement, rolling, running, jumping, dramatic play, dancing, small and whole-group activities. However, teachers had limited knowledge and pedagogical skills to understand the type of play and its benefit for children's cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical development. These results are comparable with the findings of the previous studies which indicated that DAP is (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredenkamp, 2009; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2005).

Teachers in the government ECCE centers had limited knowledge and pedagogical skills for children learning and development through play-based learning

using hands-on experience. They had also limited in-service training, proportional class size, hands-on experience teaching materials, play materials, budget, and collaboration of stakeholders for children learning and development through play-based learning. Even the teachers had focused on academic skills through teacher-directed activities using the whole class in seating them on the desk for long periods. These findings also in contrast with the research that supports the use of DAP with young children (McMullen *et al.*, 2006).

Therefore, even if educators in private, faith-based, and government ECCE centers had believed the importance of play in their classroom practices, still ECCE educators had limited knowledge and pedagogical skills on how to make decision intentionally in planning, implementing, and assessing children's activities through play-based learning for their all domain development. Also, some of the teachers might have influenced by school leaders and parents to focus in their planning the activities on academic skills through teachers dominated approach to ready children for primary school academic skills. Some of the research findings were supported by (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Thomas & Jessica, 2014).

Teaching strategies

Under this theme, some subtheme was identified as teachers' teaching strategies: planning the curriculum to achieve important goals, teaching to enhance development and learning, assessing children's learning and development, and teachers' development/or training.

Planning the Curriculum to attain important Goals

In the private center, some teachers were implementing the curriculum through play using sing songs, puzzles, store telling, and flashcards for children learning and development. In addition, the teachers were implementing the curriculum considering the children's developmental age for nursery, lower and upper KG to make the lesson meaningful to them. But they had limited knowledge and skills in considering the children's interests and socio-cultural context in setting appropriate goals through planning the curriculum for promoting learning and development. Moreover, the teachers were more intended on academic skills such as reading, writing, drawing, and numeracy to prepare children for primary school readiness; even some centers had practice extra home activities during the weekend using worksheets/or workbooks. The parents were also pushing teachers to focus on academic skills for children's school readiness. These findings imply that the curriculum was more intended for the teachers' initiated activities rather than children initiated activities/or balanced between the two approaches, which are highly focused on academic skills. In addition, teachers had inadequate knowledge and pedagogical skills on how to plan, schedule, and

organized the existing curriculum for promoting children's social, emotional, creative, cognitive, and physical development. Nevertheless, research noticed that Curriculum needs to be "learner-generated and learner-centered, yet teacher framed" (McMullen, 1999, p. 217). Within this environment, the "location of power" is shared between the teacher and the child (Wien, 1995, p. 4).

We do have a fixed schedule that was provided by our center to all of us. I'm flexible in implementing the activities according to the children's interests and learning situations. The curriculum is prepared by our ECCE center and is considered the age, interest, and culture of the children because they are learning the contents of the curriculum without stress and they are interesting to learn the contents of the curriculum through play using locally available teaching materials (PT2).

On the other hand, teachers in faith-based centers were reflected that they had practiced the curriculum through play using hands-on experience. In addition, some faith-based centers had Montessori classrooms for children learning through hands-on experience, but some were not had such centers for children learning and development. Rather the teachers were focusing on academic skills for children learning and development to prepare the children for school readiness. These findings depicted that teachers had limited knowledge and pedagogical skill on how to set goals, plan child-initiated activities, and small group activities for children's cognitive, social, emotional, creativity, and physical development. On the contrary to this fact the literature indicated that (McMullen, 1999). *We taught five subjects English, Mathematics, Afan Oromo, Environmental sciences, and Art. Some of the textbooks were brought from other private centers and adapted according to our context. Our children could learn at nursery level capital and small Afan Oromo alphabet letters through oral using the flash card by observing, touching, and identifying the shape and sound awareness of each letter. In the case of lower kindergarten they could learn how to construct simple words from alphabet letters (for example a- aduu, b-baala, c-caallee using a flashcard). Also, in the case of upper KG, they could more construct words from alphabet letters, for example with the letter "a" they made at least three words a-aduu, a-arba, a-arraba, and construct simple short sentences from the alphabet letters. She more explained that they could learn voles and consonant sounds in afan Oromo(dubbachiiftuu, dubbifama, sagalee dheeraa, and gabaabaa) at the upper KG level(FT1).*

On the contrary to this in government ECCE centers, there was nothing an organized curriculum for children learning and development through play using hands-on experience. Rather the teachers were trying their best to ready children for primary school academic skills through collecting some materials from

neighborhood private school or the old curriculum exist in the centers. These findings indicated that teachers lacked a national curriculum, hands-on experience teaching materials, limited knowledge, and pedagogical skills that affect their planning the curriculum to achieve important goals for promoting all domain development. These results are also comparable with the findings of the previous studies which indicated that DAP is (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredenkamp, 2009; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2005).

As per the investigator's observation, in private, faith-based and government centers had not yet clear, flexible, and whole child development goals; rather it was primarily cognitive focused. It was also not naturalistic experiences; rather it was an isolated skill development. Moreover, it was not daily fine and gross motor experiences, but limited gross motor development. Furthermore, it has a subject-oriented curriculum either organized on its own or borrowed from somewhere else. Also, the curriculum was organized in a subject-oriented manner such as English, Mathematics, Environmental Science, and Art rather than using an integrated curriculum. Moreover, the centers varied in: comfortably of the learning environment to explore, the number of teaching materials provided, the accessibility learning environment to all the children; the number of hands-on experiences teaching materials provided, open-ended manipulative and the amount of teacher-directed activities. Nevertheless, when they were teaching one concept, teachers could integrate different skills. For example, when they taught the word "cat" they showed the students a picture of a cat and said the words writing on blackboard or flashcard, so they taught literacy, numeracy, science, and art simultaneously as well. Generally, the contents of the curriculum focused on letter recognition, letter/sound identification, and phonemic awareness, word recognition, number sense, syllables, and short sentence structure. The previous findings were also revealed by (Chan, 2016; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2005; Lee & Tseng, 2008)

Teaching to Enhance Learning and Development

In the private center, some of the teachers reflected that teachers were used different teaching strategies for children learning and development through play, sing songs, puzzles, blocks, and locally available teaching materials to provide whole child development. The teachers were also more intended to focus on the academic skills performing the same tasks for the whole classroom to ready children for primary school, particularly they focused on literacy phonetic alphabet awareness, listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the English language. Some of the private learning centers were not formerly established for children learning and development through play-based learning using hands-on experience for individual and small group activities. Rather, the center was crowded,

lack a playground, lack learning centers, limited hands-on experience, and collaboration of stakeholders that obstructed children's holistic development. Thus it may possible to say that teachers were more intend to use teacher-directed teaching strategies through rote memorization and drill teaching academic skills. This is in agreement with the findings of (Fantun, 2013; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Ray & Smith 2010; Tirussew *et al.*, 2009).

I think the play is a natural way through which our children can learn so that nothing we taught children without play in our daily activities; play is one of the best strategies through which our children could learn all the activities in our center...PTI

On the other hand, the faith-based centers were used both child-centered and teachers-directed teaching strategies for promoting learning and development through play using hands-on experience. Even though there were variations among teachers during the classroom practice, most of the teachers were using different teaching strategies through play-based learning, sing songs, puzzle, store telling, and flashcards for small and whole-group activities for children learning and development. However, teachers had limited knowledge and pedagogical skills to plan the activities and organize the environment in considering children's developmental characteristics, unique individual interests, and socio-cultural context for their learning and development. The findings of the study revealed that teachers' beliefs and practices were both developmentally appropriate/or inappropriate practices, which seems an integrated approach for children learning and development. Some of the previous studies were also supported these findings (Beets *et al.*, 2008; Ray & Smith 2010).

Children can learn the contents of the curriculum through play using sing songs, storytelling, and puzzle and Montessori materials. For instance, she taught numbers and literacy in connecting with their daily experience, for example, zero(0) እንቁለል መሳይ(it may seem an egg),1 2 3..through sing songs የልጆች ቁርስ ምሳ እና እራት (that is, children's breakfast, lunch, and dinner) and after that she taught them to step by steps zero, one, two, three... In other words, similarly, they could learn Amharic alphabet letters as ሀ - እንደ ብርጫቆ ናት (it seems a glass), ለ- ወንበር ትመሰላለች(it seems a chair), ለ- ጅካ መሳይ ናት(it seems a fork), ሙ- መነፅር መሳይ ናት(it seems an eye glass), ሠ- እግሮቿን ሰቅላለች(it holds up its legs), ቀ- ወገቧን ይዛለች(it holds its wrist), ተ- እጇን ዘርግታለች(it stretch out its hand),...the children show the action in motion and easily identify the shape, phonic awareness and the content of the letters. (FT3).

As the informants pointed out that in government centers, teachers were facing many challenges which might have influenced their teaching

strategies to make a child-centered approach. Teachers were also indicated some of the challenges such as limited knowledge and pedagogical skills, lack of assistant teachers, shortage of classrooms, hands-on experience teaching materials, budget, and stakeholders collaboration for children learning and development. Even the teachers were teaching children with age groups 4, 5, and 6 in the same classroom in rote memorization using chalk and talk. Hence, teachers have dominated the whole classroom activities during the teaching-learning process through teacher-directed instruction. They were also teaching on blackboard arranging children on the desk for a long period through rote memorization academic skills such as alphabet awareness, reading, writing, and numeracy. The result of the findings indicates that teachers' beliefs and practices were intended to developmentally inappropriate practice for children learning and development. The research findings also supported these findings (Buchanan *et al.*, 1998; Tirussew *et al.*, 2009).

To provide experiences for one letter of the alphabet, the children are playing, painting, talking, singing, and listening to and tell stories. She may have engaged children in math, science, art, and literacy. It is enjoyable for the children and at the same time, they are learning and building gross and fine motor skills, social skills, creativity, and problem-solving skills for their development of all domains (FT1).

The investigator observed that teachers were using different strategies for children's learning and development through play-based learning during the indoor and outdoor activities at private, faith-based and government centers. Also, some of them were facilitating, guiding, and observing the children learning and development, but some were monitoring, controlling, supervising, and managing their learning. Moreover, some of them were searching for the right answer rather than encouraging a variety of open-ended responses, used primarily whole group instruction rather than flexible grouping, used primarily teacher-directed instruction rather than child-centered instruction, used competition, and grades rather than community-building experiences, used more formal, business-like relationship with children rather than a more informal, caring relationship with children and used activities personally irrelevant, too easy or too difficult rather than activities challenging yet attainable. In addition, some of them were managing children behavior by threats, punishments, and external rewards rather than managing their behavior through redirection, guidance, and problem-solving. Even some used teacher-developed rules rather than class developed rules, some of them used unclear, limits, and inconsistent accountability rather than clear rules consistent accountability. Previous studies have also described by (Birello, 2012; Ertmer, 2005; Pajares, 1992).

Assessing Children's Learning and Development

In private ECCE center, even though, there was variation among teachers in their assessment strategies, most of the teachers were using the traditional way of assessment which was focusing on academic skills using paper and pencil test like matching, test, fill in the black space the missing alphabet letters and order the arrangement of letters to make meaningful words. But, a few informants noticed that they were using observation and a kind of checklist for their assessment strategies for children's holistic development rather than on pen and pencil tests. On the contrary to this most of the teachers did not clearly understand how to use an assessment strategy like authentic assessment such as observation, checklist, portfolio, and project to assess the children's holistic development (cognitive, language, social-emotional, creativity, and physical). These findings revealed that teachers had limited awareness about formative/or ongoing authentic assessment strategies rather than focused on summative assessment for children learning and development. Therefore, teachers in private settings were used developmentally inappropriate assessment practices for children learning and development. In contrast to these findings, the literatures were also revealed by (Charlesworth, 1998; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

I'm evaluating every activity of my children from September to January. Also, I'm observing what they are doing and bring a significant change in each month, for instance in writing, reading, and expressing themselves, storytelling, social skills, emotional and physical development. I'm more trying to include parent's suggestions for children learning and development. However, some parents had limited awareness about their children learning and development, so they did not give much emphasis to ECCE, and they do not have shared their responsibility rather they had left everything for teachers (PT3).

In the case of the faith-based ECCE center, the informants described that an assessment was very essential for teachers to get feedback, decision making and to report the overall performance of children to stakeholders about children learning and development. Even if there was a variation among teachers in their assessment strategies for children learning and development, as the participants noticed that some of the teachers were more focused on academic skills using pen and pencil test such as continuous test, matching, fill in the blanks space the missing letter and order the arrangement of letters. However, a few teacher informants revealed that a few of them were using an observation, checklist, and sample of children's performance to assess their children's learning and development which seemed DAP. In addition, they also considered the feedback of their parents in their assessment strategies to make them relevant to their learning context. The findings depicted that teachers lacked adequate pre-service and in-service training that

limited their knowledge and pedagogical skills on how to assess through authentic assessment strategies. Thus, teachers in faith-based settings were used developmentally inappropriate assessment practices for children learning and development. The previous research was also found that (Chan, 2016; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Thomas & Jessica, 2014).

All learning activities may have their mechanisms of assessment strategies for children's learning and development. For example, we may assess our children's physical development during outdoor activities, particularly their gross motor development. And we can also assess our children's language development through vocabulary, storytelling, matching, fill-in-the-blank space the missed letter, reading, writing, and sound awareness (FT3).

In the government ECCE center, despite the importance of an assessment for children learning and development, the teachers did not aware of the importance of assessment for children learning and development. Some of the informants indicated that teachers varied in their understanding, beliefs, and practice based on their training, teaching materials available, and the collaboration of stakeholders for children learning and development. In addition, some teachers said that there were limited teaching materials, trained teachers, play materials, and support from stakeholders for children learning and development which was influence the assessment strategies. Even the assessment strategies were disorganized, some of the teachers used a kind of pen and pencil test, but some of them used an observation for assessing the children's development and learning and the other were not assess their children properly for their learning and development. Therefore, teachers in government settings lacked knowledge and pedagogical skills on how to use comprehensive assessment strategies for children learning and development. These results also supported by (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Rose & Rogers, 2012).

They can assess their children through testing, oral question, demonstrating, testing, asking a question, matching, reading, writing, fill the blank space the missed letter, and sometimes they could also observe their performance during the indoor and outdoor activities to evaluate their overall performance(FT1, T2, T3).

Teacher's Development/or Training

In a private center, some of the informants reported that the teachers were lacking competence in the area of ECCE philosophy, child-centered methods, plan to set appropriate goals and objectives for children's social, emotional, creativity, spiritual, cognitive, and physical development. In addition, the school leaders and parents also lacked awareness about the ECCE philosophy, curriculum, child-centered teaching methods, and parental reciprocal relationship for children learning and development, rather they push

them towards high academic skills. Moreover, they reflected that the opportunities for continuous professional development were very less. Even as some informants revealed that the government was neglecting them from opportunities for continuous professional development through a summer program. Moreover, some informants reflected that the attitude of parents and community were less towards ECCE professionals just as simple routine work which might be everybody joins the profession without appropriate training for children learning and development. These results were also confirmed by (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Rose & Rogers, 2012).

The recently in-service training has been given for ECCE teachers could be focused on theoretical orientation rather than focusing on practical orientation for a child's learning and development. For example, instead of training us on teaching approach/or pedagogical skills, they are focused on standardization, the size of the classroom, rules, and regulation without considering the reality of our centers (PT1, 2, & 3).

In faith-based centers even though the teachers had similar beliefs about children learning and development, they were varied in their practice during the implementation due to some environmental and personal factors. In addition, they indicated that some teachers were effective in their profession due to their pre-service training, in-service training, the passion they have, teaching materials available, play materials available, proportional class size, existing curriculum, the comfortably of learning environment, and the collaboration of stakeholders for children learning and development. Some of the teachers indicated that they had limited opportunities for continuous professional development and the government was also neglecting them in providing an opportunity in a summer program to improve their beliefs and practice for children learning and development. The previous research findings were also confirmed by (McMullen, 1999; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Vartuli, 2005).

I believe that teachers should also get appropriate pre-service and in-service training for their professional development to properly support their children learning and development according to their developmental age, individual interest, and socio-cultural context. The government has paid attention to teachers' professional development whether they are working in private, faith-based, and government ECCE centers, for they are working for nation-building through nurturing their youngsters(FT1).

On the other hand, the government ECCE teachers reflected that teachers who had ECCE certificates have an opportunity to continue professional development in the summer program, but the training was not relevant to the real situation going on for children learning and development at the ECCE settings. In addition, those teachers who did not have an ECCE certificate had limited opportunities for

continuous professional development to improve their knowledge and pedagogical skills. Moreover, the informants reported that the government did not deploy trained special needs educators for children learning and development according to their developmental age, individual interest, and socio-cultural context. Since regular teachers were limited knowledge and skills about how to support children with special needs according to their interests and needs. In addition, teachers also lacked training about how to plan, implement and evaluate individualized educational plans (IEP) for children with special needs learning and development in an inclusive setting. These findings are comparable with (Abu Jaber et al., 2010; Heisner & Lederberg, 2011; Kim, J., Kim, S., & Maslak, M. A. 2005).

I had trained at diploma level (10+3) in Civic and Ethical Education to teach primary school children during the pre-service training. So, I'm not an appropriate teacher for children's learning and development at the ECCE center, because she has limited knowledge and pedagogical skills on what, when, and how children can learn in the ECCE center. In addition, I have limited experience on how to enhance children learning and development, particularly on how to create teamwork with parents and teachers to create a caring community of learner (GT2).

4.6.4. The Major Challenges of ECCE Teachers Faced in Applying Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs into Practices

Even though the ECCE centers were creating many opportunities for children learning and development, teachers were faced some challenges in promoting children's social, emotional, creativity, cognitive and physical development through play-based learning. The challenges were varied according to the type of centers and the beliefs and practices they held for ECCE.

In private ECCE centers, the informants reflected that there were some challenges raised about the implementation of DAP in their centers. Some of the challenges pointed out as crowded learning environment, lack of trained special needs educators, limited in-service training opportunities, limited hands-on experience, lack of learning centers, limited awareness of families about children holistic development, limited use of technology, limited knowledge, and pedagogical skills for children learning and development through play using DAP strategies according to their developmental characteristics, unique individual interest and socio-cultural context that made inconsistency in teachers' beliefs and practices. In contrast to these findings, the literature is reflected by (NAEYC, 2009).

On the other hand, the informants from faith-based noticed that even though some of them had their

interactive learning environment and hands-on learning experiences for children learning and development. Some of the centers had limited in-service training, learning materials, hands-on experience, playground, use of technology, and lack of special needs educators for children learning according to their interest and needs. In addition, there was the incompatibility of curriculum between KG and grade one primary school, limited awareness of parents about children's holistic development, and limited collaboration of stakeholders for children learning and development. On the contrary to these findings the previous findings indicated by (Chan, 2016).

As the informants noticed that the government ECCE centers had limited teaching materials, play materials, hands-on experience, support from the stakeholders, and less parental engagement for children learning and development. In addition, the participants reflected that there was a lack of assistant teachers, limited parental awareness about children learning and development, limited knowledge and skills, and shortage of classrooms for children learning and development, even due to the shortage of trained teachers and classrooms children with lower and upper KG were learning in the same classroom by one teacher without any assistance for the half-day program. Moreover, the informants revealed that there was a lack of special needs educators to support children with special needs according to their needs and interest. Even the teachers had limited knowledge and skills on how to plan, implement and evaluate individualized educational plans (IEP) for their learning and development. These results were also confirmed by (McMullen et al., 2006; Ray & Smith, 2010).

The major opportunities that Encourage Teachers to Put Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs into Practices

Even though there were some challenges to implement DAP for children learning and development, there would be some opportunities to encourage the implementation of DAP in private, faith-based, and government centers. Some of the opportunities the participants revealed that there have been some attempt to encourage the implementation of DAP such as ECCE policy, the beginning of to nationalize the curriculum, the beginning of training teachers at diploma and degree program at college and university level, teachers commitment, the beginning of allocating budget for ECCE, the improvement of stakeholders collaboration, the experience existed in private and faith-based centers, the recent attention of researchers to ECCE and the recently paid attention of the government for children learning and development throughout the country, even if it was lacking the quality for promoting children's social, emotional, creativity, cognitive, spiritual and physical development. These findings also supported by previous research studies (McMullen, 1999; Ray & Smith, 2010).

Limitation

This study has some limitations. First, only the researcher observed the classroom as a none-participator and there was no cross-checking between observers. Second, only nine teachers from three private, three government, and three faith-based centers were interviewed and observed. An expanded study could therefore usefully compare more teachers at a wider range of school types; therefore add considerable depth to the findings.

CONCLUSION

Even though the teachers had some variation among private, faith-based, and government and even within the same type of ECCE centers in their beliefs and practice, still teachers had limited knowledge and pedagogical skills about ECCE philosophy to set the goals properly what, when, and on how to plan, organize, implement and assess the indoor and outdoor activities for children learning and development. In addition, they had limited knowledge about theories underpin DAP and the pedagogical skills on how to make their teaching strategies child-centered to meet the children's developmental characteristics, individual interest, and socio-cultural context for promoting children social, emotional, creativity, cognitive, and physical development. Moreover, they had limited knowledge and skills on how to plan, implement and evaluate individualized educational plans (IEP) for children with special educational needs learning and development.

However, teachers were used the traditional way of teaching approach through teachers-directed instruction in planning, implementing, and assessing the same activities for the whole group. In addition, they were used to manage their children's behavior through reinforcement, rewarding, ignoring, and punishing them instead of facilitating an opportunity to solve their problems. Therefore, teachers were not fully recognized of DAP meanings, beliefs, and practices for children's social, cognitive, emotional, creativity, spiritual, and physical development. Also, the government should extend pre-service training from certificate level to degree level to improve teachers' developmentally appropriate beliefs and practice for children learning and development.

Implications

This section presents the implications of the findings from the current study for teachers, school principals, teacher education programs, and the Ministry of Education (MoE). Recognizing ECCE teachers' developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices help teachers, ECCE leaders, parents, experts, and policymakers plan, organize, design, coordinate, implement and evaluate best practice for children social, emotional, creativity, spiritual and physical development. The following are some suggested implications that were derived from this study:

Teachers also need more information and continuous professional development on how to use their personal beliefs and how to become advocates for DAP. In addition, they need guidance in negotiating the conflict between DAP and environmental influence. Moreover, they need administration and stakeholders' collaboration to improve teachers' practices and the classroom environment. Even, they need to have structural support, like educational aids, materials and supplies, small class sizes, and flexible scheduling, and administrators need to provide opportunities for teachers to plan together, to observe one another, to visit other settings sites, and to attend related early childhood workshops. Finally, ongoing dialogue needs to exist between teachers, administrators, school board members, and parents about developmentally appropriate practices and their importance for young children.

ECCE teachers have to be encouraged to work closely with the leaders of the centers, special needs educators, parents, and stakeholders to implement DAP strategies. Also, they can develop their knowledge and pedagogical skills through participation in pre-service training, in-service training, summer program, conferences, and workshops, and reading current research journals related to developmentally appropriate practice. Moreover, the center leaders, school boards, Adama education office, OEB, and MoE should facilitate the structural and process quality of ECCE for children learning and development, which affect the implementation of DAP.

There are a variety of difficulties that teachers expressed in government ECCE centers which provide some practical implications for early childhood educators moving forward. MoE and other policymakers must consider the time constraint which teachers find themselves facing challenges during the classroom practices in government centers. Since the government centers had planned the program for half-day which was influenced the teacher's DAP implementation in their classroom practices. In nature, DAP needs an extended time for children learning and development to explore their environment through hands-on experiences.

Lastly, there are some implications for OEB and MoE. When the reasons for the participant teachers' actual practices are considered, those such as physical conditions of classrooms, policy, curriculum, training teachers, training special needs educators, training ECCE leaders, standards, and a high number of children to teachers' ratio is directly related to OEB and MoE. Although the aim of MoE to increase the schooling rate of ECCE is valuable, inappropriate physical conditions and the number of children to each educator increasing in government schools is counterproductive. Therefore, the structural quality characteristics of new ECCE institutions should be

considered by OEB and MoE. In addition, the curriculum, hands-on experience teaching materials, and furniture should be DAP, and accreditation criteria could be set properly in considering children's developmental appropriate age, unique individual interest, and socio-cultural context for their learning and development.

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