

Private and Government preschool: The Case of Debre Tabor preschools, North Gonder Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study examined government and private early childhood education in Debre Tabor Town. Descriptive surveys were employed. A total of 30 teachers participated after they were chosen using simple random sampling. In addition, directors were selected through a comprehensive sampling technique. A mixed approach that combined qualitative and quantitative methods was used in this study. Data were collected through a questionnaire and an interview. Descriptive statistics' were used for data analysis. The collected data were analyzed using table, frequency, and percentage. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The major findings were that most teachers and parents had misunderstandings about the practice of government and private early childhood education. The findings in this study were that private preschools have better parental involvement, availability of educational material, and teaching methodology than government preschools. The outcome of this study was to raise awareness for the community, parents, preschool teachers, and educational administrators about their role in the improvement of the ECCE program.

Keywords: Private preschool, Government preschool, North Gonder Ethiopia

Introduction

Pre-schooling is an educational program that helps children to be physically, socially, psychologically, and cognitively ready for primary schooling. Therefore, their goals are helping children to develop their emotional, cognitive, ethical, physical, and social domains; encouraging their ability and enthusiasm to continue to learn in both formal and informal environments; and developing their social and educational skills (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2010). The preschool classroom should have different learning centers like literacy, mathematics, science, sensory, block, block, dramatic, music and movement, woodwork, and art. As reported by Cakirer and Garcia (2010), a governmental preschool was found to be better than a private preschool in organizing play corners pedagogically.

Ethiopia is one of the twenty-six countries in sub-Saharan Africa that has developed the ECCE Policy Framework in collaboration with UNICEF and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In addition to the ECCE strategic operation plan and guidelines, the new ECCE framework has also been developed and consists of four pillars:

1)Parental education; 2)Health and Early Stimulation Program (parental to 3+ years); 3)Preschools: community-based kindergarten (4 to 6+ years); and 4)Community-based non-formal school readiness (MOE, 2010).

Preschool is the first step in a child's educational journal. Early childhood experts have the opinion that attending preschool programs helps to promote children's social and emotional development and prepare them for primary education (Justice and Vulkalick, 2000). The first five years of life are highly significant; what children learn and feel during this time, particularly about themselves, will be foundational to the rest of their life. At this stage, a child develops a good relationship with people around him (Hightower, 1999). Early childhood is defined as a period from 3 to 6 to 7 years old. This early period is considered to be the most important of biological, psychological, social, and emotional growth and change. The first years of life represent a critical window of opportunity in the healthy developmental phase throughout the life span. Healthy early child development includes the physical, social, emotional, language, and cognitive domains of development, each equally important and strongly influencing well-being

through life (High Tower, 1999).

In the human life cycle, the early childhood period is a critical period that requires due attention and a great deal of investment. Children are developing more rapidly during the period from birth to age five than at any time in their lives, shaped in large part by their experience in the world (Belay, 2015). These early years of development are critical for providing an affirm foundation in cognitive, language, motor, and social development, as well as emotional and moral development (Belay and Hawaz, 2015). Stimulating, nurturing, and maintaining stable relationships with parents and other caregivers is the most important to children's healthy development.

To effectively run the preschool program, planning appropriate curriculum, using the services of health, education, nutrition, and other fields, and encouraging parents interest and involvement in all aspects of the program should be given due attention. Pre-school is the place where children gain maximum benefits other than their home. So, the physical set-up, site, surroundings, plan, and program are dominant and important in achieving the goal of pre-school education (Choudham, 2002).

The Ethiopian training policy states that kindergarten education helps to prepare children for primary school, and the program takes up to three years by involving children between four and six years' age. The education provided at kindergarten school would enable children to express their feelings, appreciate beauty, and learn numbers (MOE, 2002).

Early childhood education is a crucial component of basic education and the first step toward realizing the objectives of universal education and the foundation of human development. In order to accomplish this, all children must start preschool at a young age and participate in an improved learning environment that fosters their curiosity and creativity.

Numerous factors, including student engagement, instructional media, class size, instructor qualities, student-teacher connection, learning environment, setting up, students' economic situation, and teacher professional qualification, are used to gauge the quality of education. Young children receive excellent care and education from qualified professionals. According to Howw (1994), specialized training results in enhanced quality interactions with children, such as sensitivity to their needs, increased job satisfaction, and knowledge for professional work with children. Therefore, having high-quality early childhood education in preschools provides teacher training. Children in preschool who receive early childhood care and education from professionals are more sensitive and have a more favorable attitude toward their work.

In order to raise awareness about preschool teachers, parents, the community, policymakers, and other

stakeholders, a researcher conducted a study on government and private preschools. Insufficient professional skill, lack of knowledge about preschool settings, inadequate play areas and spaces, lack of educational materials, and lack of emergency preparedness prevent children from achieving better academic performance, self-confidence, imagination, and creativity, as well as social interaction with peers and a limit on their overall development. The practice of preschool education in the provision of appropriate learning environments, such as indoor and outdoor, parental involvement, the role of the preschool teacher towards children's education, teaching methodology, and availability of educational materials. However, there is a dearth of research on the comparative study on government and private preschools.

Methods

Research design and approach

The researcher used a descriptive survey, using a mixed approach, that is, both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The mixed approaches were used to capture in-depth and wider data and information for a critical analysis and understanding of existing private and government preschools, which is very important for gathering relevant and adequate information with a certain period of time. A descriptive survey design was used to arrive at a conclusive finding by collecting large data within a short period of time and collecting data and generalizing it to the entire population under study.

Participants

Participants were preschool teachers and directors. There were six government and eight private preschools in Debre Tabor Town. The researcher selected two private and two government preschools randomly. There were 36 teachers and 4 directors in the selected preschools. Among this, the teacher selected 30 teachers by using simple random sampling and 4 directors by comprehensive sampling technique.

Data collection tools

The researcher used a questionnaire to collect data from teachers regarding the types of teaching methods practiced in government and private pre-schools, the situation of parental involvement in government and private pre-schools for children's education, and the roles of pre-school teachers for children's education in government and private pre-schools. In addition, the researcher designed an interview guide and conducted in-depth interviews with the school directors regarding the major educational materials available in government and private preschools and the situation of parental involvement in government and private preschools.

Data collection procedures

The data-gathering process was conducted from February 10 to May 10, 2023. The first stage of the data collection procedure was to obtain permission from the respective department head of early childhood care and education at Debre Tabor University. Then, a questionnaire was administered to all participants after the researcher explained the purpose of the study and gave instructions on how it should be filled out. In-depth interviews were conducted with directors. To check the validity and reliability of the proposed questionnaires, the instrument was carefully checked using Cronbach's alpha techniques.

Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics (standard deviation, mean value, and frequency). The data obtained from in-depth interviews were analyzed through qualitative analysis using word description and narration thematically.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The researcher distributed 30 questionnaires to teachers from the whole target population of the study, which included directors from the entire target populations. (Table 1)

No	Variability		Government		Private	
			F(No)	P (%)	F(No)	P (%)
1.	Sex	Male	-	-	-	--
		Female	15	100	15	100
		Total	15	100	15	100
2.	Educational status	Certificate	--	--	2	13
		Diploma	13	87	10	67
		Degree	2	13	3	20
		Total	15	100	15	100

The above table (1) indicated that item 1 showed there were no male participants. On the other hand, 15 (100%) of the respondents were female from government preschool, and there were no male respondents, and 15 (100%) of the respondents were females from private preschool. Item 2 showed that 13 (87%) of the participants were diploma

teachers. There are no certificate teachers, and 2 (13%) of respondents were degree teachers from government pre-schools and 10 (67%) of respondents' diploma teachers. The remaining 3 (20%) and 2 (13% of the respondents were degree and certificate teachers, respectively, from private pre-school.

Table 1 Teacher's response on teaching methodology

Items	Government		Private	
	F(No)	P(%)	F(No)	P (%)
Student centered	5	33	1	6.7
Teacher centered	--	--	1	6.7
Both student and teacher centered	10	67	13	86.667
Total	15	100	15	100
Frequency of play as teaching method				

Always	9	60	4	27
Sometimes	6	40	11	73
Never	--	--	--	--
Total	15	100	15	100
Which area children more learn				
Classroom	5	13	11	73
Play ground	10	87	4	27
Total	15	100	15	100
Teaching methodology matched with children's ability and interest				
Yes	9	60	14	93
No	6	40	1	7
Total	15	100	15	100

In the above Table 2, the percentage result indicated that most of the time, 10 (67%) of the respondents used both teacher- and student-centered methods of teaching, and 5 other hand, 13 (87%) of respondents use both student- and teacher centered methods of teaching, and 1 (6.7%) of respondents use teacher centered and student-centered methods of teaching from a private preschool.

In addition to this, 9 (60%) of the respondents use play always as a teaching method, and 6 (40%) of the respondents use play sometimes as a teaching methodology, and there were no respondents using play as a teaching method from a government preschool. Whereas from private preschool, 11 (73% of the respondents) use play sometimes as a teaching method, and 4 (27% of the respondents) use play always as a teaching method.

From government preschool 10 (67%) of the respondent's children learn more in the playground, but 5 (33%) of the respondent's children learn in the classroom. Whereas 11 (73% of the respondents's children learn more in the classroom and 4 (27% of the respondents said children learn in the playground).

As observed from Table 2, 4 (93%) of the respondents say that "yes" teaching methodology matched with their ability and interest. 17% of the respondents said "no" from private pre-school, 9(60%) of the respondents, and 6(40%) of the respondents said "yes" and "no," respectively, from

(33%) of the respondents used student-centered methods of teaching, and there were no teachers from government preschools who used teacher-centered methods. On the government pre-school.

Data obtained from open-ended questionnaires from private preschool respondents showed most of the time teaching and learning methodology is matched with their children's ability and interest. On the other hand, respondents in government preschools said students's teaching-learning strategies are not matched with their children's abilities and interests.

Data obtained from interviews with the directors said most of the time in private preschools. Teach children through play. Children learn more through puzzles, poems, songs, riddles, and play. If children always learn through play, they become confidential, disciplined, active in problem solving and decision-making, and bring better academic performance. Generally, in private preschool, children learn through play. On the other hand, directors said in government preschool. Teaching children through is play, puzzle, poem, and song.

The finding here implies that private preschool is better than government preschool regarding teaching methodology. But the frequency of play used as a teaching methodology is better in government preschool than private preschool.

Table 2, teacher's response on parental involvement

Items	Government		Private	
	F (%)	P (%)	F(No)	P (%)
Check children's homework and reading activity				
Yes	9	60	13	87
No	6	40	2	13
Total	15	100	15	100
Positive attitude towards children education				
Yes	14	93	14	87
No	1	7	1	13
Total	15	100	15	100
Fulfilling children's educational materials				
Yes	10	67	13	87
No	5	33	2	13
Total	15	100	15	100
Parent teacher communication				
Yes	14	93	15	100
No	1	7		
Total	15	100	15	100

Table 3 shows the majority of teacher respondents concerning parents checking children's homework and reading activities. 9 (60%) respondents said "yes" and 6 (40%) respondents said "no" in government preschool, whereas 13 (87%) respondents said yes and 2 (13%) respondents said "no" in private preschool.

The percentage results regarding positive attitude towards "yes" and 5 (33%) responded "no" in government preschool. However, 13(87%) of the respondents said "yes" and 2(13%) responded "no" in private preschool, and the majority of teachers responded concerning parent-teacher communication, saying yes and 14(93%) and 1(7%) said "no" in government t preschool. Whereas 15(100%) "yes" in private preschool.

Data obtained from open-ended questionnaires: in private preschool, most of the respondents said that there is strong interaction between parents and teachers in order to assure children's educational progress through different systems like telephone, face-to-face interaction weekly, and communication books, and parents directly involve and participate in every school-related activity, like their children's education.

children's education indicate that 14 (93%) responded "yes" and 1 (7%) respondent "no" in government preschools, whereas 14 (93%) responded "yes" and 1 (7%) responded "no" in private preschools.

In addition to this, parents fulfilling children's available educational material indicates that 10 (67%) respond

The respondents in government preschool said there is minimum interaction between parent and teacher regarding children's education; parents interact face-to-face with teacher every two months.

Data obtained from the interview: the respondents said in private pre-school, parents are always engaging or involving in their children's educational system. Most of the time, parents critically know their children's behavior, strengths, and weaknesses regarding their children's educational system. Because sending children to private preschools are trained and educated persons. So parents have the ability to check children's physical and social wellbeing. In addition to these, parents interact with teachers through communication books. The main purpose of a communication book is to check children's strengths

and weaknesses and the day-to-day activities of children. When teachers write students strengths and weaknesses to their parents and parents write again to teachers, then parents and teachers work collaboratively and control children's educational system effectively. On the other hand, directors said, in government preschools, parents are sometimes involved in child care practice and education.

The finding implies that in private preschools there is more parental involvement towards children's education than in government preschools.

The finding implies that private preschool is better at parental involvement towards children's education than government preschool.

Table 4, the role of teacher in children's education

Items	Government		Private	
	F(No)	P (%)	F(No)	P(%)
Selection of available instructional media				
Yes	10	67	14	93
No	5	33	1	7
Total	15	100	15	100
Guiding children's during learning				
Yes	10	67	14	93
No	5	33	1	7
Total	15	100	15	100
Give equal chance during learning				
Yes	11	73	14	93
No	4	27	1	7
Total	15	100	15	100
Participation of teacher on children care				
Yes	12	80	13	87
No	3	20	2	13
Total	15	100	15	100
Participation of teacher on preparing instructional media				
Yes	11	73	15	100
No	4	27		
Total	15	100	15	100

Table 4 below demonstrated that the majority of teacher respondents concerning the selection of available instructional media said yes; 10 (67%) and 5 (33%) responded "no" in government nt preschool. Whereas 16(93) responded "yes" and 1(7%) responded "no" to private preschool.

The respondents show that regarding guiding children's learning processes, 10 (67%) say "yes" and 5 (33%) say "no" in government preschools; however, 14 (93%) say "yes" and 1 (7%) say "no" in private preschools.

Similarly, the majority of teachers responding concerning giving equal chance during learning in government preschool said yes, 11 (73%), and 4 (27%), said "no," whereas as 14 (93) responded yes, and 17% responded "no" in private preschool.

On the other hand, participation of teachers in child care in government preschool: 12 (80%) respondents said "yes" and 3 (20%) respondents said no. Whereas 13(87%) respondents said yes and 2(13%) respondents said "no" in private pre-school, and also teacher's participants responded concerning the participation of teachers in preparing instructional media and responded, yes and 4(27%) respondents said "no" in government pre-school, although 15(100%) responded "yes" and all teachers participate in the preparation of instructional media in private pre-school.

Data obtained from open-ended questionnaires: the respondents in private preschool said teachers are always involved in child care practice. This means teachers critically supervise the daily routine of children, from students going to school up to going home, and when

children's are playing, eating, learning, toileting, and other issues. On the other hand, respondents in government preschool said teachers participate in child care practice, particularly teachers control the daily routine of the school.

The respondents in both government and private pre-schools said teachers always participate or are involved in the preparation of instructional materials, but most of the time in private pre-schools, not only teachers participate in the preparation of instructional materials, but also students participate.

Data obtained from the interview: directors said in a private preschool, teachers have a vital or critical role in children's education in the school system; teachers are the primary teacher and caregiver; the major role of the teacher is controlling the daily routine of the school. This means during play, the teacher critically supervising or checking

the playground. If there are damaged or broken materials while children's eating, toileting, resting, and learning, the teacher should be providing appropriate guidance or supervising children towards children's learning. Another important role of a teacher is preparing instructional material in order to make teaching and learning so easy and understandable.

On the other hand, directors said in government pre-school teachers have an important role in children's education; the role of the pre-school teacher is giving appropriate care and education while children's learning, playing, eating, toileting, etc. But in the educational system, teachers impart knowledge towards children. The finding here implies that the role of the preschool teacher towards children's education and care practice is better in private preschool than government preschool.

Table 5 Availability of educational material in public and private pre-school

Items	Government		Private	
	F(No)	P(%)	F(No)	P(%)
Most common educational material				
Playing with toys	-	-	2	13
Color identification	3	20	3	29
Building block	-	-	-	-
Cartoon film watching	1	7	1	7
Production and construction material	5	33	5	33
Color, building during and construction material	6	40	3	20
Total	15	100	15	100
Sufficient educational material				
Yes	10	67	10	67
No	5	37	5	33
Total	15	100	15	100
Educational material with children development and interest				
Yes	10	67	14	93
No	5	33	1	7
Total	15	100	15	100

Table 5 shows that 6 (40%) of respondents said students learn more through color identification, building blocks, and construction materials, and 5 (33% of the respondents) said students learn more through production and construction materials. 1 (7%) of the respondents said students learn through watching cartoon films; 3 (20%) of the respondents said students learn more through color identification from government preschool. On the other hand, 2 (13%) of the respondents said students learn more through play with toys, 3 (20%) of the respondents said students learn more through color identification. 1 (7%) of the respondents said students learn through building blocks, 5 (33% of the respondents) said students learn more through production and construction of materials. 3 (20%) of the respondents said students learn through color identification,

building blocks, construction material, and 17% of the respondents said students learn through using other educational material in private preschool.

The percentage result regarding sufficient educational material 10 (67%) of the respondents said "yes" and 5 (33%) of the respondents said "no" from government and private pre-schools. On the other hand, 10 (67%) of the respondents said "yes." Students' educational material matched with their developmental level and interest, and 5 (33%) of the respondents said children's educational material is not matched with their developmental level and interest from government pre-school. Whereas 14 (93%) of the respondents said educational material is matched with their developmental level and interest of children, and 1 (7%) of

the respondents said children's educational material is not matched with their developmental level and interest of children from private pre-school.

Data obtained from open-ended questionnaires in a private preschool, most of the time the respondents said educational materials matched with children's developmental level and interest that educational materials prepared based on children's grade level, developing level, and interest. But some respondents said pre-school learning materials are not matched with children's developmental level and interest, whereas in government preschool respondents said some preschool educational materials match with their children's developmental level and interest, that is, prepared based on children's age, developmental level, and interest; however, most educational materials are not matched with their children's developmental level and interest.

The respondents in both private and government pre-schools said there are many educational materials that are available in pre-school, such as letters, alphabets, models of domestic and wild animals, flash cards, building blocks, small stones and sands, pictures, teacher guide materials, student books, etc., which are the main educational materials in both pre-schools.

Data obtained from the interview, the school principal said that both government and private preschools have no sufficient indoor and outdoor educational material. The major educational materials are alphabets, models of letters and words, small stone and block building materials, printed letters, construction materials, the image of wild and domestic animals attached to the wall, flash cards, and books. But private preschool participants said that the availability of outdoor play materials is beam balance, slide, and rotation play, whereas government preschool outdoor play materials are beam balance and slide. The finding showed that private preschools have better educational material than government preschools, but in both settings, that was not fully sufficient for children's

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to assess government and private preschools in Northern Ethiopia. The analysis of the data showed that private preschool settings apply the early childhood teaching method more than government preschools, and in government preschool settings there were limitations in applying the early childhood teaching method (Chunga, 2013). It has been suggested that the teaching learning process required appropriate approach teaching. In this aspect, teachers need to know which strategy is better for students learning and when it is found in many studies. Proper learning seems hard to take place following a single method of teaching. The analysis of the data showed that, in private preschool settings, there were better parental interactions towards children's education than in government preschool. Parents were the primary teachers

and caregivers for children. The finding of this study confirmed the literature reported by Sanders and Epstein (2002), who stated that family and school work together in striving to give learners activity education on preparing their children with necessary skills. The analysis of the data showed that both preschool setting teachers have a crucial role in guiding, caring for, and educating children with their ability and interest. In both preschool settings, teachers lack the required professional qualification; particularly private preschool teachers were better in knowledge, skill, and attitude than government preschool teachers. This finding confirmed the literature reported by Catherine (2014), which states that teachers's roles in early childhood classrooms were those of lecturer, storyteller, program planner, conflict mediator, and parent resources. Teachers provide materials and activities at the correct time for maximum growth.

The analysis of the data showed that the availability of educational materials was better in private preschools than government preschool settings. As Aida (2008) suggested, different educational materials were important for children to learn in a clear and easy manner. Such educational material as a text book, pen, building block, construction material, flash card, play with toys, etc. can be employed during the lesson. Even different teaching sheets can be used as mediums of instruction in or pupils need.

Study limitations and implications for future research

There are some limitations to this study. Only two private and two government preschools were participants of this study; it was not feasible to evaluate all of the schools. Additionally, only a relatively small sample of teachers and principals of schools were included in the study. As a result, one major weakness of the study may be the difficulty of generalizing its conclusions.

Conclusions

Every child should grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. The way that government and private preschools implement early childhood education depends on their teaching methods, parental involvement in their education, the role of the preschool teacher, and the availability of educational materials. The results of the study indicated that private preschools apply appropriate early childhood teaching methods as government preschools, have better access to educational materials than government preschools, and have better parental engagement in their children's education than government preschools. In addition to this, both government and private teachers play a vital role in guiding their children and child care practices. Additionally, private preschools have better playgrounds, facilities, and school facilities than government preschools. Furthermore, compared to government preschools, private preschools provided better access to educational resources. However, it needs to be improved.

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