

A review of policy frameworks for advancing pedagogical competence of preschool teachers in Ethiopia

Adane Hailu Herut¹, Motladi Angeline Setlhako²

¹Dilla University, Dilla, Ethiopia

²Dept of Curriculum and Instructional Studies, UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

This study aims to review the policy frameworks for enhancing the pedagogical competence of preschool teachers in Ethiopia spanning from 1994 to the present. Utilizing qualitative document analysis, the research examines nine key policy documents related to teacher competence development for early childhood care and education. Findings reveal that, while progress has been made in establishing ECCE policies, they often lack explicit targets, assessment criteria, and adequate focus on reforming preschool teacher education. Systemic barriers affecting teacher development remain insufficiently addressed. The study concludes that substantial policy revisions are necessary to improve competencies, emphasizing the importance of aligning pre-service training with ongoing professional development. Recommendations include the establishment of clear benchmarks for assessing teacher competencies and mechanisms for continuous evaluation and improvement to ensure quality education for all children.

Keywords: policy, pre-school education, teacher education, pedagogy, competence standards, twenty-first century skills

Introduction

Policy documents play a pivotal role in shaping and evolving a country's educational system. They function as guiding frameworks that delineate the objectives, principles, and strategies for advancing education (UNESCO, 2015; Shishigu, et al., 2017). Primarily, these documents offer a distinct vision for the education sector, elucidating the desired outcomes and goals. They establish guidelines for curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices, thus ensuring a standardized and cohesive educational approach.

¹ Corresponding author: UNISA DE doctoral program student. Email: adaneh@du.edu.et

Additionally, policy documents encompass various facets of the education system, encompassing accessibility, equity, and quality (European Commission; 2017). They lay out measures to enhance inclusivity, promote equal opportunities for all learners, and bridge educational disparities. Furthermore, these documents frequently underscore the significance of teacher training and professional growth, acknowledging the crucial role educators play in fostering effective learning environments. Policy documents also address issues like governance, funding, and infrastructure, delivering a comprehensive framework for the efficient management and allocation of resources. By setting explicit goals and strategies, policy documents encourage coordination among stakeholders, including government bodies, educational institutions, and communities, thereby promoting collaborative efforts to enhance education (World Bank, 2018; Hanushek, & Woessmann, 2008; 2015; Fullan, & Hargreaves, 2016). This is why it was underscored that policy documents serve as indispensable blueprints for the advancement of the education system, ensuring consistency, equity, and progress within a given country.

The significance of education policy for developing countries like Ethiopia cannot be overstated, particularly in the context of the nation's broader development objectives. By establishing standards and providing strategic direction, policy not only steers the transformation of Ethiopia's human capital (OECD, 2021), but also lays the foundation for improved health (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2010), economic growth (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008; Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011), social progress (Fumagalli et al., 2020; Almualm, 2013), and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2018; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). The government has increasingly recognized the pivotal role of education in national development plans, emphasizing its significance. A coherent and responsive education system is paramount in unlocking Ethiopia's full potential and ensuring sustainable progress in various sectors.

In the past decades, Ethiopian education policy landscape has passed through a remarkable transformation (MoE, 1994; 2003; 2010; 2018; 2020; 2022). In 1994, the Education and Training Policy that was introduced, as a seminal document that laid the groundwork for a cohesive, nationwide educational system. Its primary objectives were to enhance access, promote equity, and elevate the quality and efficiency of education across all levels (MoE, 1994). However, as we entered the 2010s, it became increasingly evident that the education system was grappling with persistent challenges in meeting the demands of the 21st century. Literacy rates remained disappointingly low, and learning outcomes were far

from satisfactory (MoE, 2018). In response to these pressing issues, Ethiopia embarked on a journey of major reforms, primarily through comprehensive strategic initiatives like the Roadmap for Education (2018-2030) (MoE, 2018), Education Sector Development Program (ESDPs) and the subsequent policy frameworks and directives in the sector including pre-school education (MOE, 2003; 2015; 2018. 2020; Shishigu, et al., 2017).

The more recent reform endeavors have placed a strong emphasis on equipping pre-school students with competencies essential for both life and the workforce. The educational paradigm is shifting away from traditional, knowledge-centric, examination-oriented learning towards more student-centred, activity-driven pedagogical approaches (MoE, 2015; 2018). This is the main reason why pre-school teachers should acquire key competences namely, how to think critically, how to solve a problem, creativity, and digital literacy have assumed top priority within the educational framework (MoE, 2018). Well-defined competency frameworks now delineate the specific skills and proficiencies students and student-teachers should acquire at each school and training institutions respectively (MoE, 1994). Concurrently, Pre-school teachers are receiving increased support under the reform programs like the Teacher Education System Overhaul, aimed at elevating their quality, status, and aligning their teaching methodologies with modern standards (MoE, 2003; Mekonnen, 2008; Tessema, 2007). The physical infrastructure and technological resources in schools are also undergoing a nationwide upgrade, facilitating the implementation of modern, multi-dimensional teaching methods (MoE, 2018). The ultimate goal, as envisioned in the policy of 1994, is the cultivation of well-rounded, productive citizens who can actively contribute to the nation's developmental objectives (MoE, 1994; 2018).

One effective way to gain insights into the complexities of educational issues is through the analysis of policy documents. This approach acts as a valuable research tool, allowing for a deep exploration of the core principles and content within these documents. As noted by Cardno in 2018, this methodology is particularly well-suited for qualitative research, enabling researchers to thoroughly understand policy documents. Such understanding is essential for effectively implementing educational strategies. By analyzing these documents, researchers can interpret objectives and uncover the underlying values that shape the policies. This study aims to apply this method to Ethiopian educational policy documents, specifically focusing on the emphasis placed on preschool teacher education and identifying potential shortcomings in this area. We will examine national objectives and priorities related to

preschool teacher education, aiming to highlight gaps through a careful review of key policy documents.

2. Understanding the Ethiopian Education Policy Framework: Literature Review

The literature surrounding Ethiopian education policy highlights a complex strategy aimed at tackling the country's educational challenges, structured around three main themes: Education Policies and Programs, Child Development Frameworks, and Teacher Development Programs. Collectively, these documents represent a thorough initiative to transform and enhance the educational environment in Ethiopia. They focus on the diverse needs of stakeholders and strive to ensure that future generations receive a quality education rooted in effective developmental and teaching practices. Below, each category of documents is discussed in more detail.

2.1 Education Policies and Programs

This literature review brings together various scholarly insights on significant education policies in Ethiopia, starting with the Education and Training Policy (ETP) introduced in 1994. The ETP has been acknowledged for its role in standardizing curricula and fostering inclusive learning environments (MoE, 1994). However, challenges in its implementation, especially in rural regions, have been highlighted (Hailu, 2018). While some researchers praise the policy for its effective focus on inclusion and standardization (Sichigu et al., 2017), others argue that it falls short in addressing cultural relevance and funding challenges (Shishigu et al., 2017). The ETP also sought to enhance initial teacher preparation by focusing on professional ethics, teaching methods, and practical experience (Shishigu et al., 2017). Nevertheless, scholars argue that the policy may have neglected local concerns, such as the necessity for ongoing support systems (Ambissa, 2020). Furthermore, there are concerns regarding the adequacy and rigor of preschool teacher programs, pointing to a lack of institutional capacity and specialized skills (Tessema, 2007; Shishigu et al., 2017). These critiques underscore the need for further exploration of the ETP's strengths and weaknesses, particularly concerning its influence on preschool teacher education.

The next significant document is the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (EEDR), which outlines a vision for transforming the education system from 2018 to 2030, emphasizing access, equity, quality, relevance, and efficiency (MoE, 2018; Wannan, 2023; Demeso, 2020). Although the EEDR recognizes the significance of preschool education,

scholars have pointed out a lack of detailed strategies regarding preschool teacher education (Abraha & Sisay, 2022). The roadmap falls short in providing comprehensive plans to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills, leaving an essential aspect largely unaddressed (UNESCO, 2019; Nisrane, 2020). While it is reasonable to anticipate that initiatives will be incorporated to improve preschool teacher qualifications, the absence of clear information raises questions about the roadmap's dedication to ensuring high-quality early childhood education.

The third document in this category is the Education Sector Development Program VI (ESDP-VI), which aims to tackle persistent challenges within Ethiopia's education system, particularly in early childhood care and education (ECCE) (MoE, 2020; Hailu, 2018). ESDP-VI sets ambitious targets, including a requirement that all pre-primary teachers possess an ECCE degree (MoE, 2020). However, scholars emphasize that sustained support and investment are crucial for achieving these objectives (Abraha & Sisay, 2022; Taddese & Rao, 2021). Ongoing challenges such as regional disparities, resource constraints, and inadequate training for preschool teachers continue to impede progress (Abraha & Sisay, 2022). Reports indicate that ESDP-VI's targets for primary enrollment have not been met, highlighting persistent issues like overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of qualified teachers (Woodhead et al., 2017; MoE, 2020). While ESDP-VI aims to confront these challenges, scholars stress the importance of a comprehensive approach to ensure all children have access to quality early childhood education.

2. 2 Child Development Frameworks

The first document in this category is the Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (PFECCE), which plays a crucial role in advancing early childhood education in Ethiopia (MoE, 2010). Researchers view this framework as a significant step forward, particularly due to its focus on involving various stakeholders and promoting holistic child development (Yizengaw & Tessega, 2020). The expansion of the O-Class program, designed to offer early learning opportunities in community settings, has greatly improved access to education, especially in rural areas (Young Lives, 2020; Tilahun, 2022). However, challenges regarding the quality of these programs remain, with issues such as overcrowded classrooms and inadequately trained facilitators (Young Lives, 2020; Woodhead et al., 2017). There is also an urgent need to enhance teacher education, as many educators lack sufficient training, and the existing curriculum often falls short in addressing child development and play-based learning adequately (Mulugeta, 2015; Fantahun, 2016). While the PFECCE marks progress,

additional efforts are necessary to resolve these quality issues and ensure that every child has access to high-quality early childhood education.

The second document is the 2018 General Education Curriculum Framework (GECF), which represents a significant shift in Ethiopia's approach to early childhood education by adopting a competency-based model that aligns with international best practices (MoE, 2018). Scholars have praised this framework for emphasizing essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration—skills that are crucial for preparing children for future challenges (MoE, 2020). Its focus on holistic development, which integrates subjects like native language, environmental science, and socio-emotional learning, is recognized for its comprehensive nature (MoE, 2023). Furthermore, the framework promotes student-centered instruction and encourages parental involvement, which are seen as positive advancements toward creating engaging learning environments (MoE, 2020; Abraha & Mendisu, 2022). Nonetheless, researchers stress the importance of ongoing efforts to ensure effective implementation and to tackle challenges related to resource allocation and teacher training in order to fully achieve the framework's objectives.

2.3 Teacher Development Programs

The first document in this category is the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), a pivotal initiative aimed at improving Ethiopia's teacher education framework. Researchers have acknowledged TESO's impact on increasing the number of qualified teachers and introducing a more rigorous training program (MoE, 2002; 2003; Shishigu et al., 2017). However, there are ongoing concerns about the adequacy of the training provided. Critics argue that TESO's emphasis on standardized competencies may not fully address the specific needs of early childhood education (Tessema, 2007; Shishigu et al., 2017). Tessema (2007) highlights that focusing primarily on general educational skills overlooks crucial aspects required for preschool teachers, such as understanding child development and play-based learning. This indicates that, despite TESO's advancements, more attention is needed to tailor training to the unique requirements of early childhood educators.

The second document is the Teacher Development Programs Blueprint (TDPB) from 2006, which builds on TESO to standardize and enhance teacher development programs in Ethiopia (MoE, 2006). The TDPB underscores the importance of equipping preschool teachers with specialized knowledge and skills (MoE, 2006). However, scholars have raised concerns about its implementation. Adem (2022) notes strengths like the focus on improving

teacher education methods; yet challenges such as a shortage of qualified staff and accountable training institutions persist (UNESCO, 2006). Additionally, some experts argue that reforms like TESO may have unintentionally limited college programs, potentially compromising quality (Adem, 2022). While the TDPB signifies progress, researchers emphasize the need for further enhancement of teacher competencies, particularly at the preschool level, through dedicated training and effective governance.

The third document is the Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (TECF), designed to guide the development of preschool teacher training programs in Ethiopia by emphasizing key competencies such as child development and professional practice (MoE, 2020). While the framework offers a comprehensive approach, scholars have expressed concerns about its alignment with the specific needs of preschool education (Abraha & Sisay, 2020). Research suggests that the TECF may place too much emphasis on subject content, potentially neglecting vital areas of child development, including motor skills and socio-emotional growth. Additionally, disparities between the language used in preschool teacher education (English) and the language of instruction in preschools (often in the mother tongue) pose additional challenges. The absence of adequately trained and experienced instructors further complicates quality implementation. Scholars advocate for a more holistic framework that effectively prepares teachers to address the diverse developmental needs of young children.

Lastly, the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) was created to define and elevate teaching excellence by outlining three key domains: professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement (MoE, 2012; Ginja & Chen, 2020). While the NPST offers a comprehensive framework for teacher development, scholars have highlighted the need for specific guidance tailored to preschool teachers (Hoot et al., 2004). Although the NPST establishes general standards applicable across all educational levels, it lacks specific benchmarks for evaluating competencies crucial for preschool educators, such as knowledge of child development and play-based learning (Gupta et al., 2021). This underscores the necessity for tailored standards and assessment tools that address the distinct requirements of early childhood education, ensuring that the NPST effectively supports the development of high-quality preschool teachers in Ethiopia.

3. Methods and Materials

This study utilized document analysis, a well-established and effective research method, particularly appealing to postgraduate students engaged in scientific research. By adopting a qualitative approach, examining educational policy documents provides an accessible and cost-effective way to collect and analyze data, especially when used as a supplementary method in smaller-scale or case study investigations (Lingard & Ozga, 2007; Cardno, 2018). Consequently, this research relies on the analysis of policy documents to fill the gap created by the inability to directly explore government policy intentions and priorities related to a specific program (Cardno, 2019; Bowen, 2009). The main aim of this study is to conduct an in-depth review of relevant literature concerning preschool teacher education, focusing on the development of pedagogical competencies and practices in Ethiopia since 1991. In this evaluation, We utilized a range of information references, including the Education Development Roadmap for Ethiopia (2018-2030), the Policy Framework addressing Early Childhood Care and Education, the comprehensive Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), the Education Sector Development Program-IV (ESDP 6), the National Professional Standards for Teachers, the Framework for Pre-school Teacher Education Curriculum, and the Pre-school Education Curriculum Framework. We systematically categorized these documents based on their nature and focus areas. Furthermore, We examined the stated national imperatives pertaining to the pedagogical competence of pre-school teachers, addressing them within their respective sections in the documents.

N ^o	Policy document	Theme addressed	Date formulated
<i>Category 1: Education Policies and Programs</i>			
1	Education and Training Policy (ETP)	Standardizing curriculums, promoting inclusive learning environments, strengthening initial teacher preparation	1994
2	Education Development Roadmap (EDRM)	Transforming the country's education system, improving access, equity, quality, relevance, and efficiency 2018 - 2030	2018
3	Education Sector Development Program (ESDP)	Addressing longstanding challenges in Ethiopia's education system, particularly focusing on improving early childhood care and education 2021-25	2020
<i>Category 2: Child Development Frameworks</i>			
4	Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education	Improving early childhood education in Ethiopia, emphasizing stakeholder involvement and holistic child development	2010

	(PFECCE)		
5	General Education Curriculum Framework (GECF)	Guiding the development of pre-school teacher training programs in Ethiopia, emphasizing key competencies such as child development, curriculum facilitation, and professional practice	2018
Category 3: Teacher Development Programs			
6	Teacher Education Systems Overhaul (TESO)	Improving Ethiopia's teacher education system, increasing the number of qualified teachers, introducing a more rigorous teacher education program 2002 - 2003	2003
7	Teacher Development Program Blueprint (TDPB)	Standardizing and improving teacher development programs in Ethiopia, preparing preschool teachers with specialized knowledge and skills	2006
8	Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (TECF)	Guiding the development of pre-school teacher training programs in Ethiopia, emphasizing key competencies such as child development, curriculum facilitation, and professional practice	2022
9	National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST)	Standardizing teaching excellence by outlining three key domains: professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement	

Table 1: List of Education Policy Documents

We accessed these documents through the Ministry of Education's website in Ethiopia, available at www.moe.gov.et. Our search criteria revolved around key themes, including the purpose, intended functions, priorities given to pre-school teachers and their training methods and potential gaps. After a thorough examination of the eight documents, we classified them into three overarching themes; national education policies and frameworks, child development policy, and pre-school teacher development. Our analysis aligns with these major themes to provide a cohesive understanding of the themes.

3. Results

The analysis of documents was made in accordance with their nature and focus areas. The first category of focus (Category 1) encompasses the overall national education policies and programs, including the Education and Training Policy (MoE, 1994), the Education Development Roadmap (MoE, 2018), and the sixth Education Sector Development Program (ESDP-IV) (MoE, 2020). In Category 2 entails documents that regulate child development such as, the National policy framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (MoE, 2010), and Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework (MoE, 2020) were in focus.

The final is Category 3 that entails document that regulate preschool teacher development such as, Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) (MOE, 2003), the National Teachers' Professional Standards (MoE, 2012), and Pre-school teacher education Curriculum Framework (2020).

3.1. Category 1: Education Policies and Programs

A. The Education and Training Policy

The Education & Training Policy, which was endorsed in 1994, stands as a pivotal document in the development of Ethiopian education. It laid down the foundational philosophy and framework that guided the education system of the country for many years after. At its core, this policy was driven by two overarching objectives; “to broaden and enhance equitable access to education and to foster efficiency and effectiveness across all educational levels” (MOE, 1994:1). The guiding principles of this landmark policy revolved around the idea of “enabling all Ethiopians to actively engage in the process of personal and societal development” (MOE, 1994:2). To achieve this vision, the policy set out to restructure the entire educational system into a unified structure with a standardized curriculum spanning from pre-school to primary, secondary, and tertiary education. A notable emphasis was placed on the utilization of regional and local languages as mediums of instruction, wherever feasible, to facilitate inclusive learning.

In the quest for enhanced educational quality, the policy prescribed significant reforms in teacher education. It called for the establishment of higher diploma teacher training institutes and the implementation of continuous professional development programs. The introduction of national standards and examinations aimed to monitor learning achievements and qualification requirements. Recognizing the pivotal role of well-qualified teachers, the policy underscored the importance of ensuring an adequate supply of trained educators (MOE, 1994:20). Nevertheless, despite the strengths embedded in this policy framework, empirical studies have revealed a significant gap between its ideals and the reality on the ground, particularly in rural Ethiopia. Hailu's (2017) analysis, for instance, highlighted the persistence of challenges related to access and educational quality, which posed a significant barrier to achieving the goals of the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP). Similarly, another study unveiled a shortage of school-age children accessing education, signaling that barriers to entry still persisted (Mulugeta, 2015).

The implementation of the policy has also been marred by issues concerning the caliber and relevance of study programs, as well as the teaching workforce's insufficient capacity within the system (Ahmed, 2013). In line with several other low-income African nations, Ethiopia continues to grapple with substantial obstacles in its pursuit of a more accessible and effective education system, a challenge exacerbated by rapid population growth, as noted by the United Nations in 2017. One particular area that the policy statement did not adequately address is the preparation and enhancement of pedagogical competency among teachers in the pre-school education system (Shishigu et al., 2017). These gaps underscore the shortcomings in the practical implementation of Ethiopia's education and training policies.

B. Education Development Roadmap of Ethiopia (2018-2030)

The Education Development Roadmap of Ethiopia, spanning from 2018 to 2030, was crafted with a strategic vision to realign the country's educational system with the ever-evolving demands of the 21st century. It keenly identified several pressing challenges that demanded immediate attention, including subpar literacy rates, lack cluster learning outcomes, and a conspicuous mismatch between the skills imparted by the education system and those sought after by contemporary industries (Ministry of Education, 2018). A pivotal aspect of this roadmap centred on the transformation education and training programs to equip students with the requisite competencies. A cornerstone of this transformation was the establishment of robust education-industry linkages to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and workplace demands. This visionary approach aimed to prepare students not only academically but also professionally, aligning their skills with the demands of the job market.

Beyond these pivotal areas, the roadmap extended its reach to encompass a wide spectrum of educational facets. Curriculum reform, for instance, was seen as pivotal in modernizing and streamlining the educational content. Moreover, the roadmap emphasized the imperative of expanding digital and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education, recognizing the growing influence of technology and interdisciplinary knowledge in the contemporary world (MOE, 2018). Inclusivity was another cornerstone, with the roadmap underscoring the importance of community participation and innovative financing models to ensure that education becomes accessible and beneficial to all segments of society.

One of the strategic objectives, as outlined in the roadmap, was to elevate the status of teaching as a profession and make it an attractive career choice. This goal also extended to programs dedicated to training pre-school teachers for the future (MOE, 2018; Nisrane, 2020). In a comprehensive exploration of this concept, Abreha and Mendisu (2022) further elaborated on the idea that achieving quality education would necessitate integrated programs for pre-school teacher training. Their insights emphasized the role of policy intervention in reshaping curriculum, staff profiles, and practical aspects in accordance with the evolving needs of early education.

While the roadmap remains in the planning stages, it is worth noting that its full impact and effectiveness are yet to be measured. However, it envisions education not only as a means to impart knowledge but also as a catalyst for Ethiopia's broader aspirations. By enhancing human capital development and technological skills, the roadmap aims to position Ethiopia competitively in the global knowledge economy and work towards its ambitious goal of achieving lower-middle-income status by 2030 (MOE, 2018). This aspiration underscores the critical role of education in propelling Ethiopia towards industrialization and economic growth.

C. Education Sector Development Program-IV (ESDP-IV) (2021-2025)

The Education Sector Development Program-IV (ESDP-IV) in Ethiopia, spanning from 2021 to 2025, presented a comprehensive strategic framework with clear guidelines. This program sought to address various challenges of education encountered during the past five Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs I-V), with a particular focus on early childhood education, emphasizing the imperative of widening access to pre-primary programs in an equitable manner (MOE, 2015; 2020). One of the pivotal objectives of ESDP-IV revolved around elevating the quality of teacher education programs for pre-school children programs, particularly those catering to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). This was aimed at establishing curricula and instructional standards that were aligned with the needs of young learners. This included equipping future educators with the essential skills in child-centered pedagogy, effective classroom management, and the ability to identify developmental delays (MOE, 2020). To gauge the progress of these initiatives, the program established performance indicators. These included metrics such as the percentage of pre-schools led by teachers holding diplomas or degrees in early childhood education, student-teacher ratios, and the availability of play and learning materials per child (MOE, 2015). However, it is too early to evaluate the ESDP-IV's weaknesses and strengths of the

implementation of these ambitious reforms as it is new. Budgetary constraints and a shortage of qualified teacher educators were recognized as challenges in the future. Moreover, the program acknowledged that limited educational resources at the community level posed ongoing barriers to professional development (MOE, 2020).

Despite its expansive scope, fully achieving ESDP-IV's early childhood education goals within the stipulated timeframe proved to be a formidable challenge. It became evident that sustained investment and capacity building were imperative to address disparities that hindered Ethiopia's most vulnerable children from exercising their right to education. Notably, ESDP-IV differed from its predecessors by addressing the issue of pre-primary education. It set an ambitious goal of having all pre-primary education teachers hold an ECCE diploma, starting from a baseline of 0% in the first year (MOE, 2015).

Unfortunately, in previous years of implementing Early Childhood Education and Development Programs (ESDPs), a subsequent report revealed that the desired outcome was not achieved. Specifically, in the 2019-20 period, the gross enrolment ratio fell considerably below the government's ESDP objective of enrolling 80% of children in the pre-primary age group by the year 2020 (Kim, Araya, Ejigu, Hoddinott, Teferra, & Woldehanna, 2022). The report highlighted numerous challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, teachers on low-paid temporary contracts, poorly qualified educators, and low overall teacher motivation (Woodhead et al., 2017; MOE, 2020). Furthermore, ESDP-V, while continuing the government's commitment to pre-primary education, aimed to cover 15% of pre-schools with adequately trained teachers. Unfortunately, there was a dearth of achievement data available for this endeavor, indicating suboptimal management (MOE, 2020:15; Woodhead et al., 2017). These challenges underscore the importance of addressing the critical issues impeding the progress of Ethiopia's education system, particularly in the realm of early childhood education.

3.2 Category 2: Child Development Policy and Framework

A. Early Childhood Care and Education Policy Framework (2023)

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy Framework, unveiled in 2010, served as a cornerstone in charting the course for Ethiopia's ECCE sector development. This visionary document adopted a holistic and all-encompassing approach, aimed at nurturing the well-being and lifelong learning potential of children aged 0-8 years. Recognizing the pivotal significance of the formative early years, it embarked on a mission to lay down a robust

foundation for their holistic development (MOE, 2010). At its core, the ECCE Policy Framework set forth one of the crystal-clear missions: “to bolster every facet of a child’s growth encompassing cognitive, linguistic, physical, social, and emotional domains” (p.iv). With unwavering determination, it aimed to establish uniform minimum standards and curricula, thus ensuring that high-quality ECCE services were universally accessible throughout the nation (MOE, 2010).

A standout feature of this framework was its resounding call for collaborative efforts and community engagement. It meticulously delineated the intricate web of coordination mechanisms and meticulously outlined the responsibilities of a diverse array of stakeholders, ranging from parents and local administrative bodies to non-state service providers (MOE, 2010). This holistic perspective, viewing the child within the context of the entire community, underscored the pivotal role of synchronized endeavours in nurturing the young learners' care and intellectual stimulation.

The ECCE Policy Framework also cast a spotlight on the significance of well-prepared early childhood teachers and caregivers. It aptly recognized that the provision of high-quality ECCE services hinges upon the expertise of teachers and teacher educators well-versed in child development norms, age-appropriate pedagogies, and adept at addressing the unique needs of young learners (MOE, 2010:8). Consequently, the document made an earnest plea for a comprehensive overhaul of pre-service teacher training programs, designed to augment the competencies tailored explicitly for early education. This framework also emphasized the importance of aligning the development and implementation of pre-primary teacher training in higher education with the pre-primary curriculum (p.7). By laying down its commitment to the children population, the ECCE Policy Framework aimed to ensure that they embark on life's journey with a robust and healthy start, a fundamental prerequisite for reaching their maximum potential.

The government's endorsement of the importance of early childhood education through this framework was unequivocal, echoing that this is "a vital age that requires adequate attention and a considerable deal of effort" (MOE, 2010:11). It underscored that investing in these formative years would enable children to swiftly and effortlessly acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes, setting the stage for a brighter future (MOE, 2010; Yizengaw & Tessega, 2020).

B. Pre-school Education Curriculum Framework

The Pre-school Education Curriculum Framework of 2020 underwent significant revisions, with the primary goal of providing strategic direction for early childhood education in Ethiopia. This comprehensive document aimed to establish a set of standards and recommendations that would guide the development, implementation, and assessment of curricula, spanning from pre-school to secondary education levels (MoE, 2020). One of the pivotal shifts in this Framework was its overarching vision for an education system that prioritized the cultivation of essential competencies, moving away from a traditional model that emphasized the rote memorization of facts in isolation. Instead, the emphasis was placed on aligning curricula with international best practices and the cultivation of 21st-century skills (MoE, 2020). The Framework recognized the pivotal role of pre-school education in laying the foundation for a child's educational journey. It set forth ambitious objectives that encompassed a wide range of skills, including “continuous learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, leadership, and decision-making” (MoE, 2020:39). Moreover, it underscored the importance of digital literacy and global citizenship.

Within the pre-school context, the Framework advocated for the development of prosocial qualities through a blend of family dynamics and peer interactions. Subjects such as the native language, environmental science, socio-emotional learning, arts, mathematics, and physical education were carefully crafted to provide holistic development for young children (MoE, 2023). To promote active engagement and independent learning, the Framework championed a variety of student-centred instructional methods. It encouraged participatory classroom activities, meaningful discussions, and hands-on projects, all of which aimed to enhance the educational experience of pre-schoolers. Furthermore, the document emphasized the pivotal role of parental involvement in facilitating the education of young children, recognizing the collaborative effort required to nurture their growth and development (MoE, 2020: Abraha & Mendisu, 2022).

In summary, the revised Pre-school Education Curriculum Framework of 2020 aspired to optimize early learning experiences, ensuring that Ethiopia's youth were better equipped to face the challenges of the future. Through its strategic guidance and forward-thinking approach, this Framework aimed to foster a generation of learners who possess not only academic knowledge but also the essential skills and values needed to thrive in the 21st century.

3.3 Category 3: Teacher Development Program

A. Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) (2015)

Ethiopia embarked on a transformative journey in 2003 with the initiation of the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), a comprehensive reform effort aimed at reforming teacher preparation, both in pre-service and in-service capacities, across all educational levels. This monumental endeavor was a response to the persistent challenges that had long plagued the nation's teacher education system (MOE, 2003:6). At the pre-service level, TESO ushered in a pivotal change by establishing the “Higher Diploma qualification” (p.5) as the minimum requirement for individuals aspiring to enter the teaching profession. This shift was prompted by the recognition that the previous reliance on short certificate programs had been inadequate in nurturing the requisite subject mastery and pedagogical skills (Shishigu, et al., 2017; MOE, 2003). Simultaneously, for in-service teachers, TESO mandated participation in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses grounded in well-defined competency frameworks. These CPDs were designed “to supplement the existing knowledge base of teachers, ensuring that they remained current and equipped with the latest pedagogical insights” (MOE, 2003:8).

In the realm of early childhood education (ECCE), TESO overlooked targeted initiatives to rectify issues pertaining to teacher quality. However, the program merged the pre-school teacher development concerns with the 1st cycle teacher matters, stating “more academically able teachers would be providing the foundations of education to children in the important early years” (MOE, 2003:25). It further acknowledged challenges related to the preparedness of graduates and the gender imbalance within the ECCE field (MOE, 2003; Abraha & Mendisu, 2022). By elevating qualification standards and emphasizing on-going professional development, TESO aimed to bolster the competencies of teachers, particularly in delivering child-centred education. The ambitious and multi-faceted reforms set forth by TESO held the promise of elevating the teaching profession to a position of respect and significance, with the potential to significantly enhance learning outcomes nationwide. The sustained emphasis on competency-driven, lifelong teacher development laid a robust foundation for nurturing Ethiopia's human capital (MOE, 2003:34).

Notably, these efforts resulted in notable progress within the education sector, leading to an increased number of qualified teachers serving in primary and secondary schools across the country. However, it is important to acknowledge that, as Shishigu et al. (2017) aptly noted, significant challenges persisted in the post-TESO period. This observation aligns with the assertion made by Ginja and Chen (2020) that the combination of qualifications held by

trained teachers did not meet the MOE's standards for pedagogical competence and subject knowledge. It is also worth noting that despite the comprehensive review of the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP) I-IV, which TESO consistently undertook in the preceding sections, it did not address the critical issue of ECCE teacher education. This underscores the need for further attention and reforms in this particular domain (SHishigu, et al., 2017; MOE, 2015).

B. *Teacher Development Programs Blueprint (TDPB)*

The teacher development plan (TDPB) plays an important role in regulating and unifying teacher development plans across the country. The plan, which includes a reform of existing programs initiated by TESO and a remedy for issues raised through research, field inspections and participation of stakeholders (MoE, 2006:1), provides clear expectations and guidelines for the training of pre-school teachers. A major emphasis is on the role of the pre-school teacher education system in preparing pre-school teachers to have the competences and knowledge necessary to improve quality pre-school services (page 32). The plan emphasizes that the mission and practices of teacher education schools should be well-defined and aligned with the educational policy guidelines. The commitment to providing secular and mother tongue-based education and training, promoting diversity and gender equality is the priority (page 32). The provision on infrastructure regulations and the need for independent structures suitable for pre-school education are also contained, besides additional facilities (page 33), which indicates the fundamental importance of creating appropriate learning environments for young students.

Emphasizing competent teachers, the blueprint sets standards for optimal academic and teaching qualifications, including a higher diploma and a coaching certification (page 36). To ensure high-quality instruction is imparted by seasoned professionals. The bonds between teacher education organizations and neighboring schools/communities are valued as integral for pre-school teacher preparation (page 42). This highlights the significance of robust community involvement and collaborations. Finally, the blueprint delineates essential educational competences for pre-school teachers which encompass subject knowledge, a grasp on child development, and the professional competences required to cater to varied aptitudes (page 5). Nonetheless, these general pedagogical competences apart, the document does not detail specific pedagogical proficiencies prospective pre-school teachers should possess beyond the universal competences mentioned.

In general, the development of TDPB in Ethiopia in 2006 identified some of the strengths of the Teacher Development Programme (TDP), but also identified some areas for attention and improvement. On the bright side, the program managers' ability to monitor the progress of the TDP through feedback, the consistent emphasis on strengthening teachers' education methods, and the improvement of knowledge and competences, was considered a strength (Adem, 2022). However,

challenges such as the lack of adequately qualified staff and accountable pre-school teacher training bodies, as stated by UNESCO (2006), persist. In addition, some experts considered the implementation of reforms such as TESO to limit College programs to undermine quality (Adem, 2022). It has also been called for a deeper examination of the TDP beyond institutional layers and more robust samples. Finally, although the TDPB indicates progress in certain aspects, ongoing work is needed to strengthen the development of teachers' competences, especially at pre-school level through dedicated training and careful governance.

C. National Professional Standards for Teachers (2012)

The National Professional Standards for Teachers in Ethiopia, unveiled in 2012, represent a significant milestone in the pursuit of improving quality education within the nation's teaching profession (MOE, 2012). This framework was meticulously designed with the overarching objective of providing educators with a well-defined roadmap toward achieving excellence in their roles. Within these standards, three fundamental domains were meticulously delineated, each encompassing a unique facet of a teacher's professional competence: professional knowledge, practice, and engagement (Ginja & Chen, 2020; MOE, 2012). These domains collectively set the stage for a comprehensive and holistic approach to teacher development and evaluation.

First and foremost, the professional knowledge domain casts a spotlight on the essential knowledge base that educators must possess to effectively carry out their duties. It encompasses a broad spectrum of expertise, ranging from pedagogical insights to subject matter mastery. Within this sphere, educators are expected to demonstrate proficiency in areas such as child and adolescent development, learning theories, curriculum design, and the implementation of inclusive teaching practices (MOE, 2012). By doing so, teachers are equipped with the essential tools to foster an optimal learning environment for their students.

The practice domain, the second core facet of these standards, revolves around the actual execution of teaching. It underscores the importance of meticulous planning and the skillful delivery of instruction, along with effective classroom management and the art of assessing student learning. In essence, it emphasizes the teacher's ability to orchestrate a dynamic and engaging learning experience, employing a diverse array of developmentally-appropriate teaching strategies (MOE, 2015). This domain serves as a critical compass for educators to navigate the intricacies of their daily classroom activities.

Finally, the professional engagement domain encapsulates the broader responsibilities of teachers within the educational community. Beyond their classroom duties, educators are

expected to actively engage with the school community, continuously invest in their professional growth, uphold ethical standards, and make meaningful contributions to the teaching profession as a whole. For novice teachers, there is a particular emphasis on active participation in mentoring and induction programs, signifying the importance of ongoing support and guidance in the early stages of their careers (MOE, 2015).

The assertion that the significance of these National Standards extends far beyond mere documentation is confirmed by the recent study of Ginja and Chen (2020). By providing clear and well-defined benchmarks, Ginja and Chen (2020) perceived that they serve as a guiding light for various facets of the teaching profession, including initial teacher preparation, licensing, daily practice, and the continuous pursuit of professional growth. Ultimately, the effective implementation of these standards carries the transformative potential to systematically enhance the caliber of Ethiopia's teaching workforce, thereby ensuring the delivery of high-quality education throughout the nation. In essence, they represent a pivotal step forward on the path to excellence in education within Ethiopia.

D. Pre-School Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (2018)

In 2018, the Pre-School Teacher Education Curriculum Framework of 2018, which was updated, served as a seminal document offering extensive directives for the formulation and execution of early childhood diploma programs within the educational establishments for teachers in Ethiopia. Within the professional component, there was a deliberate and substantial emphasis on the development of pedagogical skills and competencies specifically tailored for young children. The framework placed significant importance on various critical areas, including the understanding of learning theories, familiarity with child development norms, effective classroom organization, meticulous lesson planning, the implementation of play-based instruction methods, and the art of skillful assessment (MOE, 2018:24). All these elements were thoughtfully woven into the curriculum to ensure that teachers possessed the necessary expertise to engage effectively with pre-schoolers.

Moreover, the curriculum framework aimed to broaden teachers' horizons beyond the specialized domain of early childhood education. It did so by including general courses covering subjects such as language, STEM concepts, arts, health/physical education, and civic education. These courses served a dual purpose; they not only expanded teachers' own knowledge base but also prepared them to effectively impart the nationwide curriculum, thus fostering a sense of holistic education (MOE, 2018). Furthermore, the curriculum framework

underscored the significance of practical teaching experiences. Teaching practice was highly emphasized, with supervised field experiences that demanded the demonstration of key competencies. These included the ability to engage students effectively, employ differentiated instruction techniques, and manage the classroom efficiently (MOE, 2018:24). By doing so, the framework ensured that pre-service teachers were not only well-versed in theory but also capable of translating that knowledge into real-world teaching scenarios.

In essence, the Pre-School Teacher Education Curriculum Framework of 2018 played a crucial role in outlining clear expectations for the quality of pre-service training. Its overarching objective was to cultivate a highly skilled workforce of early childhood educators, fully dedicated to the holistic development of Ethiopia's youngest generation. Through its comprehensive approach to teacher education, the framework aimed to nurture a cadre of teachers who could provide the nurturing, supportive, and developmentally appropriate education that pre-schoolers deserve.

4. Discussions

In this study, several key policy areas were addressed in accordance with their collective concerns they convey for pre-school teacher education in three different categories of documents. These categories are national education policies and frameworks, early childhood education policies and frameworks, and teacher education policies and frameworks.

In the realm of national education policies and initiatives, several key documents hold significant importance. These include the nation's Education and Training Policy, The Education Development Roadmap (spanning from 2018 to 2030), and the sixth Education Sector Development Program (ESDP 6). These documents collectively serve as guiding pillars for orchestrating a comprehensive overhaul of the country's educational framework over an extended timeframe. Their objectives are multifaceted, with the primary aim being the enhancement of accessibility, quality, relevance, and overall effectiveness within the educational landscape. A paramount goal of these policies is the cultivation of a proficient human capital reservoir capable of making substantial contributions to the nation's economic advancement, thereby facilitating Ethiopia's progression towards attaining middle-income status. It is widely recognized that education occupies a pivotal role in the realization of the country's broader development objectives. In an ever-evolving global context, there is a conspicuous emphasis on aligning the education system with the exigencies of the 21st century. The need for 21st-century skills and global competitiveness takes center stage in

these educational blueprints. Moreover, these policies are not formed in a vacuum. Past implementation challenges and persisting issues surrounding quality, equity, and efficiency have significantly influenced the crafting of these new strategic frameworks.

In regard the child development policy and framework, there are documents titled “Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education” and “Pre-school Education Curriculum Framework”. Recognizing the significance of early childhood education (ECE) in shaping a child's holistic development and future learning outcomes, Ethiopia is dedicated to investing in this critical phase of education. It is widely acknowledged that a multi-sectoral approach is indispensable to this endeavor. In order to elevate the quality of ECE programs and services across the country, coordinated efforts and targeted interventions are deemed essential. These policies underscore the importance of establishing clear standards and guidelines. This includes enhancing teachers' competencies through both pre-service and in-service training, with a focus on child development theories and curriculum delivery methods. The alignment of ECE programs with global skills demands and national reform objectives is paramount. Nurturing core skills such as creativity, communication, and collaboration from a young age is a central tenet of these policies.

The third category also presented in the analysis of documents related to pre-school teacher development programs such as: Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) and Pre-school Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (PTECF). The reform of teacher education in Ethiopia represents a significant departure from the past, which was marked by imbalances, a shortage of qualified teachers, and a misalignment with the curriculum. Central to the reform agenda is the development of a competent and skilled teaching workforce. This involves a comprehensive overhaul of standards, curricula, and teacher education programs. Ensuring that initial teacher preparation equips new entrants with the necessary knowledge, methodological skills, and a deep commitment to their profession is a top priority. Equally emphasized is the need for continuous professional development to systematically enhance the teaching profession over time. In pursuit of attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, these policies outline important strategies such as merit-based incentives and the establishment of school support systems. These measures aim to ensure that teaching remains an attractive and esteemed career path in Ethiopia.

From the analysis of the policy documents, the relationship between the curriculum frameworks and standards was explored to see if the required competences of pre-school

teachers in each document are pertinent to each other. As it was seen from the documents, the Pre-School Teacher Education Curriculum Framework and the Pre-school Education Curriculum Framework share several fundamental points of connection that underscore their mutual relevance and synergy. Firstly, both of these frameworks are meticulously designed to align with the established national standards and policies, as set forth by the Ministry of Education. They share the common objective of ensuring that their respective objectives and competencies resonate harmoniously with these national guidelines, particularly in relation to the National Teachers' Standards. This alignment underscores their commitment to adhering to a standardized, high-quality educational approach.

Moreover, both paradigms exhibit a pronounced inclination towards nurturing comprehensive child development. They acknowledge the paramount significance of instilling 21st-century proficiencies, encompassing critical thinking, adept problem-solving, and proficient communication. This mutual focus on holistic advancement underscores their unwavering dedication to fostering students who are not solely academically adept but are also endowed with the skill set requisite for triumph in the contemporary, ever-evolving global landscape. In terms of pedagogical approaches, both frameworks endorse student-centred teaching methodologies. They promote active and participatory learning experiences, emphasizing hands-on activities and robust discussions as integral components of the educational process. This shared commitment to student-centered pedagogies reflects their dedication to enhancing the overall educational experience and engagement of learners.

Similarly, the Pre-school Education Curriculum Framework advocates for practices that is well-suited to the skills and interests of pre-schoolers, emphasizing a developmentally sensitive approach. Furthermore, both frameworks recognize the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders in the educational process. They emphasize that successful implementation necessitates the active involvement of teachers, families, and the broader community. This shared commitment to collaboration underscores the recognition that education is a collective effort, with each stakeholder playing a vital role in supporting the growth and development of young learners.

Based on an analysis of policy documents, there appear to be several potential areas where the development of pedagogical competence among pre-school teachers in Ethiopia could be strengthened. It was observed that the current TESO reforms have limited focus on pre-school teacher education. While TESO aimed to overhaul teacher education broadly, it did not adequately address the unique needs and challenges of pre-school teacher preparation.

Another significant concern is the insufficient emphasis on pre-service teacher education. This finding aligns with the research of Abraha and Mendisu (2022), which highlights the documents' limited guidance on restructuring pre-service Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs to enhance subject knowledge and pedagogical skills from the outset (Abraha & Mendisu, 2022). In addition, Mulugeta (2015:142) further emphasized the need for the “inclusion of ECCE in key government resource documents, such as national budgets, sector plans, and the Growth and Transformation Plan”, as well as increased attention and funding from donor agencies.

Furthermore, the general approach to early childhood teacher education within TESO underscores that ECCE concerns were merged with primary teaching without distinct initiatives to ensure pre-school teacher quality. This alignment is consistent with Ahmed's (2013) study, which found that the documents fail to address systemic barriers affecting pre-school teacher development. Issues like inadequate training infrastructure, shortages of teacher educators, and poor working conditions are not adequately addressed, potentially undermining the overall effectiveness of these programs.

While the TDPB has identified strengths, such as effective monitoring and an emphasis on improving teaching methods, challenges remain, including the shortage of adequately qualified staff and accountability among training institutions (UNESCO, 2006; Adem, 2022). Moreover, concerns have been raised that reforms like TESO may inadvertently restrict the quality of college programs, necessitating a more in-depth examination of the TDP and its implementation (Adem, 2022). Overall, while the TDPB marks significant progress in enhancing teacher development, ongoing efforts are essential to further strengthen the competencies of preschool educators through dedicated training and robust governance, ensuring that all children receive the high-quality early education they deserve.

One noticeable gap is the absence of targets and indicators for ECCE teacher competencies. National policies and frameworks lack clear targets, timelines, and impact assessment metrics specifically aimed at enhancing pre-school teacher competencies. Shishigu and colleagues also raise concerns about these documents, noting that they lack clear targets and timelines, making it difficult to measure progress in enhancing pre-school teacher competencies over time (Shishigu et al., 2017).

Additionally, there is concern about the adequacy of training content. The training curricula outlined in these documents may not sufficiently emphasize crucial aspects such as child development theories, assessment techniques, and classroom management skills, all of which are essential for effective pre-school teaching (Nisrane, 2020). A recent study by Abraha and Mendisu (2022:9) also identified alignment gaps in the preschool teacher education curriculum in four major aspects: “confinement of the curriculum to subject area contents rather than holistic child development, omission of motor skills, and a mismatch between the languages of instruction at the preschool teacher education level (English) and the preschool level (mother tongue)”.

In summary, the policy documents pertaining to pre-school teacher education in Ethiopia reveal several strengths and potential gaps that require attention and enhancement to ensure the effective development of pedagogical competence among pre-school teachers. Addressing these concerns will be essential for the overall improvement of early childhood education in the country.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This comprehensive examination of Ethiopia's educational policies, spanning from 1994 to the present, underscores a noteworthy shift towards a heightened emphasis on early childhood education (ECCE) and the professional development of pre-school teachers. Based on the analysis, it is evident that while there have been significant advancements in early childhood care and education (ECCE) policies, substantial gaps remain in the implementation of these frameworks. The study emphasizes the critical necessity for policy revisions that establish clear benchmarks and assessment criteria for the development of preschool teacher competencies. A greater emphasis on specialized training, the creation of child-centered teacher education standards, the alignment of pre-service education with ongoing professional development, and the removal of systemic barriers are vital for promoting pedagogical competence among preschool teachers. Ultimately, a cohesive and well-supported policy environment is crucial for ensuring that all children in Ethiopia receive quality early childhood education, thereby laying a strong foundation for their lifelong learning and development.

In response to the aforementioned potential gaps, national policies must undergo a comprehensive reassessment to incorporate well-defined, quantifiable objectives and timelines. This will enable the enhancement of preschool teacher competencies while

facilitating effective progress monitoring. Given the current absence of a robust preschool teacher education policy framework, it is imperative to refocus pre-service qualification standards for teachers and revamp teacher training curricula. These revisions should prioritize the acquisition of specialized preschool knowledge and skills, with a particular emphasis on child development principles, pedagogical techniques, assessment strategies, and other specialized competencies relevant to preschool education within reformed training models. Moreover, aligning pre-service curriculum and instruction with in-practice standards and the specific requirements of preschool-level education is of paramount importance to refine this subsector. By implementing these policy improvements and carefully considering the practical challenges of implementation, Ethiopia can effectively advance towards its vision of delivering high-quality Early Childhood Education and nurturing skilled preschool educators.

This research is primarily centred on the examination of policy frameworks pertaining to the educational landscape in Ethiopia. In order to acquire a more profound comprehension of the evolution of preschool educators, it is recommended that forthcoming investigations incorporate alternative methodologies. These methodologies should encompass both the preparatory and on-going professional growth of teachers, dimensions which were not exhaustively scrutinized in the present study. Furthermore, it is highly recommended to conduct supplementary research to delve into the practical implementation of these policy documents, with a view to addressing any latent issues that may surface during this investigative process.

Author Contribution

The first author wrote the initial draft and post-review revisions, while the second author supervised, guided, reviewed the draft, and contributed to rewriting the analysis, discussions, and conclusions sections.

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