The Contribution of Urban Socio-spatial Planning for Urban Pre-school Infrastructure Challenges: in the Context of Rapid Urbanization in Addis Ababa

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Abstract

This study assessed the role of urban socio-spatial planning for urban pre-school infrastructure space challenges. The study analysed policy, institutional and practice gaps in the context of rapidly urbanizing city of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A total of two private and two public pre-schools were selected from two sub cities/woredas in Addis Ababa as cases. Employing qualitative case study design, both primary and secondary sources were consulted. The primary data was collected from in-depth interview. 26 participants were selected using purposive sampling technique from urban planning and children education sectors, based on the study selection criteria. The secondary data was collected from policy documents of urban planning policies, proclamations and articles, pre-school education policies, early learning implementation reports, academic literatures and theoretical perspectives on child education as well as scholar findings on the analytical theme. The data was analyzed using discourse thematic approach. The study found that, both public and private preschools suffer from lack of adequate infrastructure, which negatively affects the quality of preschool practices. The planning policy requirements for preschool environment and early learning are not implementing rather remained as mere policy. Lack of institutional cooperation and accountability in both sectors made preschools dysfunctional. Lack of awareness regarding their roles resulted in poor-quality environments in preschools. The study concluded that, socio-spatial planning interventions are essential to improving preschool facilities and fostering healthier environment for early childhood development. Inclusion of early learning experts and policies in socio-spatial planning is important to establish institutional values and principles that protect children environment.

Keywords: *Early Learning Environment; Early Childhood Care and Education; Preschool Infrastructure; Rapid Urbanization; Socio-spatial Planning*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early learning environment encompasses different dimensions of child's surroundings, interdisciplinary intervention and holistic approach. Preschool education space requires creating responsive learning environment. Learning environment is the important parts of support system purposely altered for infants to facilitate children to experience healthy learning and development. A learning environment is defined as physical surrounding of spaces, materials, activities, and multiple routines, where schools, families and living spaces purposively altered to help infants learning process. Preschool is one of children learning environment that the childhood growth, development and education happen (Jobb, 2023; MoE, 2010; Pratt, 2014; Rakesh et al., 2023; Ukamaka, 2024; Valentini et al., 2024).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) guidelines provide principles for sustainable early childhood education and development. It refers to the process of change a child experience at early years from prenatal up to seven years. Healthy childhood development is indicated in child physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development. These features enable healthy child growth and development (MoE, 2010). Healthy childhood development requires for a child to have safe, decent, and enabling environment; these are functional family, community, schools, society, and nation that put the right policies to protect children' rights (MoE, 2010). Early childhood development builds the basis for children lifelong learning capacity, social life, cognitive ability and emotional stability (MoE, 2010). The childhood growth and development that children experience in their early ages will shape their brain and their capacity to learn, to get along with others, and their capacity to respond to daily stresses and challenges (Kuddus et al., 2020; John, 2013; Loughlin & Joseph, 1982: Piaget, 1952, Pratt, 2014 Rakesh et al., 2023; Ukamaka, 2024).

Pre-school is an education and garden place for children. In early days it was considered as a gardening place for children (MoE, 2010). Preschool infrastructural facilities are oriented based on the curricular themes and early childhood care and education environmental standards appropriate for children from age three up to seven years. Compared to the schooling set up of primary and high schools; preschool education system is dependent on the school environment conditions. Children of preschools learning, and teaching methodology use physical instruments, visual aids, teaching objects, and course-based corners. These also require kids' mobility,

interaction, participation, and various teaching corners (Diale, 2022; Harvey, 1973; Katsavounidou, 2024; Losaria et al., 2024; Sen, 2025; Sewagegn, 2021; Ukamaka, 2024).

Urbanization induced change and crises primarily affect children' holistic development (Sen, 2025). It is linked to a wide range of impacts, including poor social interaction, low educational facilities, poor schooling environmental quality and impacts on cognitive development, behavioural and socio-emotional problems (Sarwar, 2024; Tripathi, 2021). Lack of such enabling environment directly affects holistic dimension for children development and wellbeing in terms of social, cognitive, and behavioural development of children (Losaria et al., 2024; The World Bank, 2024; Tripathi, 2021; UNICEF, 2024; Valentini et al., 2024).

Rapid urbanization and inadequate responses from the urban planning sector have exposed children's educational infrastructure to the negative impacts of the environmental crisis. This disruption affects the normal process of early learning, resulting in a crisis in child care, education, and development in urban areas (Losaria et al., 2024; The World Bank, 2024; UNICEF, 2024; Valentini et al., 2024). In Addis Ababa, children often spend their preschool years in stagnant classrooms characterized by a teacher-centered educational approach, limited playground facilities, and no open spaces for running or exercise (Kim et al., 2022). Additionally, preschool areas are frequently surrounded by noise and disturbances from urban economic activities, construction sites, loud advertisements, music, traffic congestion, and crowded streets (Zewdie et al., 2016). These conditions are common features of preschool environments in Addis Ababa and contribute to a decline in both the number and quality of educational facilities for young children.

Moreover, the existing literature on urban planning and design tends to focus on the natural and constructed environments, urban-regional (spatial) planning, urban greenery, public infrastructure services, as well as urban safety and socioeconomic challenges faced by residents (Bhatt et al., 2024; El-Bouayady & Guo, 2024; Mehmood et al., 2021; Mohamed et al., 2020; Pratt, 2014; Radoine, 2024; Sarwar, 2024). However, there has been insufficient attention given to how urban planning and design impact preschool facilities and the early learning experiences of children. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the interconnected role of urban planning in facilitating and hindering preschool infrastructure as a social service for children's education and development in the rapidly urbanizing context of Addis Ababa.

Despite the presence of national and international child rights and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policies that prioritize children in urban planning, urban design has often overlooked the needs of young children's education and their rights. This oversight, highlighted by documents such as the Ministry of Education (MoE) report, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the African Charter for Children's Rights (ACCR), is primarily due to policymakers' ignorance about the issue and the resistance of existing systems to adapt to the changing demands of rapid urbanization.

As a result, preschools are struggling to meet the increasing demand for education, lacking well-designed classrooms, play areas, and engaging environments. Contrary to early childhood care and development policies, many preschools focus solely on traditional, class-based teaching methods that rely heavily on whiteboards and textbooks. Additionally, the school environment is often surrounded by intense urban activity, which raises safety concerns around school zones. Issues such as poor environmental sanitation, insufficient playground space, and inadequate safe mobility contribute to an unsuitable learning environment. Public preschools, in particular, face chronic problems like overcrowded and uncomfortable classrooms, unsanitary dining areas and restrooms, and inadequate napping spaces.

Moreover, urban planning and pre-school education sectors lack integrated policies and institutional coordination. The effort of creating an enabling child learning environment and facilities for infants is placed only on pre-school education system, which is beyond preschools capacity. As a result, the impact of urban built environmental conditions on the quality of children' life and education are becoming critical in Addis Ababa.

Thus, this study challenges policy makers and practitioners of existing preschool children education systems, urban space planning and infrastructure development policies in the manner that addresses children education infrastructure and facility need in urban areas. It also assists private and public pre-schools to understand urban space planning challenges and its contribution on early learning experiences from scientific analysis and policy evidences. Thus, this study will contribute to address the challenges of rapid urbanization, and provides insights for urban planners to effectively mitigate the negative consequences of rapid urbanization on preschools early

learning environment, and protect children rights to have decent learning environment in urban areas.

This study aims to assess the role of urban socio-spatial planning in addressing the infrastructure challenges faced by preschools in Addis Ababa. In doing so, the study analyzes the policy, practice, and institutional gaps in pre-schooling and urban planning sectors. By addressing two main research questions: what is the role of urban planning in addressing preschool space challenges? What are the policy, institutional and practice gaps of socio-spatial planning and children education sectors contributing to preschool infrastructure challenges?

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study used qualitative case study design, taking the case of public and private preschools in Addis Ababa, in order to do an in-depth study on the challenges pre-schools are facing in the current context of rapid urbanization, and the responses of urban socio-spatial planning and its difficulties. Because, qualitative case study design allows studying the research problems in-depth, asking detailed questions and analysing policies, theoretical and empirical insights. It also applies inductive reasoning approach that enables to study social issues within its social context and the cases that the issues are bounded in. It helps to describe issues within social reality like social constructivism approach underlies (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Morse & Field, 1995; Sinha, 2017).

Accordingly, this study focused on the social aspect of urban planning and design in the context of rapid urbanization in terms of understanding pre-schooling infrastructural facilities and early learning space challenges. The issues are subjective in a way that factors behind childhood education environment and the social dimension of rapid urbanization need be defined in the context of Addis Ababa urban built environment and policies. Thus, qualitative case study provided perspectives to explain the challenges that pre-school practitioners, service providers and professionals encountering within the policy context in both sectors (Baxter & Jack, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Starman, 2013)

The study is non-experimental and employs a non-probability sampling technique. One of the methods within non-probability sampling is purposive sampling (Memon et al., 2025). This

technique is particularly suited for qualitative case study research, as it allows for detailed descriptions by selecting cases from specific contexts relevant to the study. Purposive sampling enabled the researchers to choose preschools and participants that were directly pertinent to the study, facilitating a holistic and contextual analysis. Cases were selected using the maximum variation sampling method to ensure a diverse range of samples. This approach involved selecting participants from both public and private preschool sectors related to the research topic, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the subject from multiple dimensions.

Key issues addressed in the study included urban socio-spatial planning challenges and their impact on preschool infrastructure and early learning environments. These aspects were illustrated within both private and public preschool contexts. Features of a qualitative case study design, described by Creswell (2007), include selecting relevant issues of concern and incorporating multiple cases to illustrate these issues; this approach is known as a collective case study (Chowdhury and Shil, 2021; Creswell, 2007).

Hence, Megenagna and Jemo areas located in Bole and Lafto Sub cities were selected as study areas. From Bole sub city Woreda 06, 1 private and 1 public preschool were selected. From Lafto Sub city Woreda 02, 1private and 1 public preschool were selected. The reason for selecting Bole and Lafto Sub cities is because these areas demonstrate the cases and illustrate issues raised by the study in the context of Addis Ababa. The other reason is that, in order to make the study in a manageable scope. The study selected two sub cities and two Woredas out of 11 sub cities in Addis Ababa. This is a pattern in qualitative case study design, selecting individuals, groups, cases and sites for the study with manageable scope; because they can provide substantial information on the cases undertaken to be solved by the study within specific contexts or settings (Creswell, 2007; Memona et al, 2025; Sinha, 2017).

Accordingly, participants were picked purposively for an in-depth interview, after making sure of the following categorical inclusive criteria. The categories and sectors were selected first and all officers in the selected categories and sectors were participated on the interview, they were 26 participants in total. They are from the selected Sub cities and Woredas, private and public preschools and administrative heads. The categories were selected based on the case identified and the issues the research aimed to address. Qualitative Scholars Creswell (2007), Sinha (2017),

Starman (2013) and Baxter and Jack (2010) ascribe that, the sampling can be consistent with the information needed by the selected research design or case study. Thus, in purposive sampling decision can be made on who or what must be sampled including the form of sampling and the categories used to sample (Creswell, 2007; Sinha, 2017; Starman, 2013).

These are categories of inclusion criteria for participants,

1. Directors who are directing the pre-schooling curriculum from both private and public preschools. These categories of participants are from the selected pre-schools working as directors. Who are involved in implementing ECCE policy and children education curriculum through leading, monitoring and evaluation of children education environment

2. Pre-schooling Owners and Administrators from both private and public preschools, who are managing and leading the teaching and learning system.

3. Pre-schooling Education Inspection and Regulatory Officers, and Supervisors who are involved in regulating the pre-schooling practice from the selected Sub cities/ Woredas, private and public preschools.

4. Early Childhood Care and Education Officers and Child Right Officers, from the selected Sub cities/ Woredas.

5. From Ministry of Education: Children Education Sector Officers of the selected Sub cities/Woredas, private and public preschools.

6. Ministry of Urban Development and Construction Office, Addis Ababa: urban planning institute officers.

Purposively, participants for the in-depth interview were chosen using particular categorical inclusion criteria. All officers in the chosen categories took part in the interviews once categories and sectors were first determined, for a total of 26 participants. These people were chosen from a few Woredas and sub-cities, as well as from administrative leaders of both public and private preschools. Based on the recognized situation and the problems the research sought to solve, the categories were selected. Sampling ought to be in line with the data required for the selected case study or research design. Decisions regarding who or what should be sampled, as well as the

precise sampling methods and categories to be employed, are decided in purposive sampling (Baxter & Jack, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Sinha, 2017; Starman, 2013).

These are categories of inclusion criteria for participants,

1. Directors overseeing the preschool curriculum in both private and public preschools. These participants are actively involved in implementing Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy and the children's education curriculum, as well as in leading, monitoring, and evaluating the educational environment.

2. Preschool owners and administrators from both private and public establishments, responsible for managing and leading the teaching and learning processes.

3. Preschool education inspection and regulatory officers, and supervisors who regulate preschool practices in the selected sub-cities/Woredas, covering both private and public preschools.

4. Early Childhood Care and Education Officers and Child Rights Officers from the selected sub-cities/Woredas.

5. Children's Education Sector Officers from the Ministry of Education in the selected sub-cities/Woredas, encompassing both public and private preschools.

6. Officers from the Ministry of Urban Development and Construction Office in Addis Ababa, specifically from the urban planning institute.

The aim of the study was not to generalize for the sample to the population, but it is to explain, describe, and interpret the issues of early learning space challenges and infrastructure difficulties of private and public preschools within the current urban socio-spatial planning. Also, to analyse how urban socio-spatial planning response to these issues is shaping and affecting children education facilities and childhood development in rapidly urbanizing city of Addis Ababa. Scholars also agree that, sampling is not a matter of representative opinions. The domain factor in qualitative sampling is an issue of information richness, appropriateness, and adequacy (Baxter & Jack, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Morse & Field, 1995; Sinha, 2017; Starman, 2013 &). Literatures also recommend what sample size would be logical for qualitative research and purposive sampling. According to Emmel (2013), the theoretical or purposive sampling can be reflexive in qualitative

research, and the researcher is also allowed to make a decision in response to empirical findings as well as theoretical developments that occurs in the study.

Primary and secondary sources are the two main types of data used in this study. Interviews were conducted in-depth to gather primary data. Document reviews of ECCE policy, regulations, proclamations, and guidelines, child rights and urban planning policies, curriculum documents, MoE (Ministry of Education) publications, and theoretical viewpoints were used as secondary data sources.

The primary data served to inquire into the socio-spatial urban planning and design contribution to the preschool facilities, and how it is shaping the preschool education system in urban areas. It was also to assess the practical challenges of the early learning physical environment in the current condition of preschool infrastructure facilities. The secondary data sources provided the policy details that are guiding preschool education practices and urban planning. This helped to assess policies that are guiding urban planning principles and social values attributed to preschool infrastructure. ECCE polices provided the policy standards on preschool education, early learning features and principles, including standards of urban preschool infrastructural facilities.

Through this method, policy and practice gaps pertaining to the evaluation of urban planning and preschool education environments were identified. Preschool regulatory policies offered comprehensive instructions on how early learning is carried out and observed in these establishments. To gather the viewpoints of participants from related industries, in-depth interview questions were created, emphasizing their institutional, conceptual, and practical knowledge of the issues and possible solutions. Primary data was used to refine secondary information and examine the gaps in practices, institutions, and policies within the chosen sectors after secondary data had been thoroughly evaluated to answer the research questions (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021; Creswell, 2007; Memona et al, 2025;).

The secondary data chosen for this investigation is in line with the questions and goals of the study. Particularly in relation to Addis Ababa, the emphasis is on urban planning and design, urban preschool infrastructure, and urban childhood education and development. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy criteria serve as the foundation for the analysis. The research themes, goals, and questions were taken into consideration when selecting the policy documents. The

chosen policy documents are shown in the Table 1 below, along with the particular topics and contents that were used as secondary data sources.

Table 1

Policies and Contents

No.	Policy documents	Policy contents/themes
1	Addis Ababa City Structural Plan (2017-2027). Social Services, Education services, pp. 99-100. Legal Framework, pp. 14-16.	It is the current legal urban structural plan, design and strategic development framework that contained an overall framework for the spatial development of the city including urban infrastructural development.
2	FDRE Constitution Articles 89-92.	It guidelines structural plan to encompass the city needs to attain economic, social, cultural and environmental purposes.
3	FDRE Constitution Art 43(1) and (4)	It commands the structural plan to address citizens' right of basic needs, improved lifestyle and standard of life in urban places.
4	Article. 7 of the Urban Planning Proclamation no.574/2008)	It provides the basic regulation of physical development and the requirements to produce a comprehensible and coherent urban development of social, economic and spatial spheres.
5	Article 2(6) of the FDRE Constitution	It establishes a legal definitions and descriptions of the Federal Proclamation for the preparation, issuing and implementation of the Addis Ababa City Master Plan of the Proclamation No. 17/2004 and issues the operational meaning and general goals of a structural plan.
6	Article. 9(2) of the Federal Proclamation No. 574/2008.	It provides obligatory and optional regulations for permitted and prohibited land uses in the urban areas. These include the magnitude and direction of urban growth of urban areas, the principal land use classes, housing development, the layout and organization of major physical and social infrastructure.
7	National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NPFECCE), 2010.	ECCE is an international and national policy approved by Ministry of Education. The policy commands the provision of healthy growth and development environment, sufficient education space, safe and enabling environment playground.
8	Declaration of Human Right adopted by the United Nations on the Rights of the Child, the 1999 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 31, p. 9.	It instructs Children's right to play and their rights to basic needs; and to be recognized as an active member of the families, communities and societies. It commands children' needs for physical nurturance, emotional care and right to have space for social play, exploration, right to have safe and efficient learning environment. It also acknowledges and collaborates with the role the ECCE as criteria for children rights.
9	African Child Right Convention (AFCR), Article 12, p.13.	It affirms agreements to protect human rights of children, right to clean, provided and nurturing environments, to attain their basic needs and right to play.
10	The World Conference on Education for All (EFA), 1990	Articulated the significance of the early years of childhood development as foundation for the life of every child and individual.

No.	Policy documents	Policy contents/themes
11	Sustainable Development Goal #4 and # 11 (Quality Education)	Sustainable development goal # 4 aims to ensure quality and inclusive education for all children. Sustainable development goal # 11 aims to ensure cities to be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12	Ministry of Education, 2010	It is a national education policy that bestowed Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a critical role in preparing children for holistic healthy childhood care and development, and promoted as a stage of preparing infants for primary education. The policy also acknowledged as an indication to attain Sustainable Development Goal 4 that is offering quality education for every child. It also serves as a national curriculum Framework for KG and ECCE Implementation guide.
13	Education and Training Policy, 1994: p. 4.	It guides the national KG Education Structure and Implementation Policy.

Data analysis

Discourse thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. Discourse thematic analysis best fits for qualitative case study and purposive sampling. Because, the nature of thematic topics of childhood development in urban setting, the pre-schooling system in the problematic urban infrastructure and planning issues need a holistic analysis of the entire cases in public and private contexts. Thus, discourse thematic data analysis strategy was significant to do detailed description of cases, secondary data, the context of the public and private preschool education system and early learning environment (Creswell, 2007). This study followed five major systematic ways processing qualitative data using coding; and finally conjunct and refine the secondary data. The first one was data familiarization: this step involved transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the data, and noting down the initial ideas. At this stage the major ideas were highlighted and written down for each transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory brings more light to children learning environment and its potential (Bandura, 1977). Social surrounding and the overall interaction in the social environment have a cumulative result on individual's cognitive process (Bandura, 1977). Particularly, children learn from what they see and observe effectively (John, 2014). Hence, learning directly correlated to the

observation of models (John, 2014). Thus, this approach provides a significant mechanism to understand infants learning habits as well as their social impact in their cognitive process. Children interaction and habitation in school environment directly model positively or negatively to their childhood development (Bandura, 1977; John, 2014).

Consequently, preschool' lack of proper spaces and open environment affect the core education principle of infant learning system (Diale & Sewagegn, 2021). The basic methodology of infants learning, and teaching must be operated by play; that is learning by play and teaching through play (Jobb, 2019; MoE, 2010). The main success factors of preschool are the childhood life, growth, learning and holistic development process (John, 2013). They are significantly affected by preschool experiences, education, and care; which will bring impact upon later children' school success (Pratt, 2014). This schooling methodology requires appropriate place, space and environment for urban pre-school education facilities (Jobb, 2023; Katsavounidou, 2024; UNICEF every child, 2019; Valentini et al., 2024; Woldeamanuel, 2020).

Albert Bandura's social learning theory also ascribe that, humans learn a behavior from their social environment and explain when and how this learning happens (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's work also prescribes directions towards the understanding of how children learn different behavior from their social environment as well as their surrounding physical settings. As a result of that social work practice promotes person-in environment perspective in understanding the surrounding influence of kids' environment on their growth and development.

Ecosystem Theory

Ecosystem theory also promotes understanding and studying individual's whole system provides and holistic views of the full range of influence a social environment on individuals' growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). It also gives a direction to understand how children learn different behavior from their social environment as well as their surrounding physical settings (John, 2014). Children' living and learning conditions, and their response to environment can potentially result in their attitude of acquiring knowledge and developing behaviors based on the circumstances in which they grow, live and learn. For instance, a child that grew in the environment where waste is damped anywhere, can develop careless attitude towards giving care for the nature and environment (Valentini et al., 2024). A child that educated in the school

surrounded by crowded and disturbing environment can develop unstable and irresponsible behavioral related problems (Bandura, 1977). Hence, the quality of the physical environment children grow up and learn can have an important influence on their health and holistic development; it has extended impact on their later life. Key aspects of the physical environment include decent educational facilities and playground spaces, the nature of the built environment of preschools and exposure to environmental toxins (Chawla, 2020; Eyasu & Paolo, 2020; Woldeamanuel, 2020;).

Beyond that, ecosystem theory strengthens on the perspective that, understanding and studying individual's whole system provides a holistic view of the full range of influence by social environment on individuals' growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). It also gives a direction to understand how children learn different behavior from their social environment as well as their surrounding physical settings (Chawla, 2020; Diale, 2021; Eyasu & Paolo, 2021; Katsavounidou, 2024; Rakesh et al., 2023; Sen, 2025; Valentini et al., 2024;).

To provide conducive environment that facilitates the learning and development of preschool children, the physical, social, and daily routine environmental factors must be thoroughly assessed and integrated into the curriculum design and class application (Wellhousen, 2002; John, 2014; Kerman and Gabel, 2007). Every dimension of teaching and learning process including classroom environment's design must reflect its program priorities and philosophy of early childhood care and development (MoE, 2010; Pratt, 2014). The basic methodology of infants learning, and teaching must be operated by play; that is learning by play and teaching through play (Loughlin and Joseph, 1982; MoE, 2010). For example, a mathematics subject skill development requires the availability of play instruments and toys like for numeracy learning: shapes, patterns, and counting in the child's critical early ages are vital (Diale, 2021; Harvey, 1973; Duncan, 2022; Katsavounidou, 2024; Losaria et al., 2024; Sen, 2025; Ukamaka, 2024). And a science concept that requires students' engagement, it must provide involving environment and materials, to teach concepts through hands-on work with materials on outdoor natural engagement with physical activities, rather than by traditional direct instruction on classroom whiteboard and exercise book. Thus, preschool teaching methodology requires appropriate place, space and environment.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Role of Socio-spatial Planning Policy in Response to Preschool Environment Problems

Urban planning is a significant urban development discipline that has holistic approach. It deals with the every segments of urban environment classified into four groups: natural, physical, economic and social environments (Singhal, 2011). Urban planning enables these parts of urban environments to achieve goals that can be planned in urban environment as urban development purpose (Mohamed, et al., 2020). The most important urban development goal consists of creating sustainable social, economic, natural and physical development, utilizing resources, maintaining efficient and effective land use, developing urban areas, protecting environment and historical values and improving condition of citizens (Singhal, 2011). These factors describe that the major field of urban planning is directly related to urban space, that urban planning effect on the decision related to the physical space in urban plans particularly spatial planning that shape the built environment of social and environmental sustainability (UN-HABITAT, 2007). It is with in this context that urban socio-spatial planning decisions are the collective planning of criteria given to land use, density and neighborhood unit design in urban planning. These factors shape the spatial planning decisions on how to use urban land that urban development literatures describe as mixed land use, associating density to deal with building such as floor areas ratio and population patterns, and neighborhood unit design criteria to shape the urban social built environments (Singhal, 2011; van Vliet and Karsten, 2015). These include urban preschool education facilities and physical environment establishments.

Following these socio-spatial policy concepts it is essential to analyze, whether children learning environments are planned with children friendly planning approaches and policies that promote the wellbeing of healthy childhood development and growth, based on children rights and early learning standards (Katsavounidou, 2024; Singhal, 2011; Van & Karsten, 2015).

The working structural plan of Addis Ababa (2017-2027) placed an overall structural framework for the spatial development of the city including every development plan (The Addis Ababa City Development Plan, 2017-2027). This plan functions to direct the urban needs to address economic, social, economic and environmental needs. This is also specified by Articles 89-92 of the FDRE

Constitution, and stated as citizens right or urban residents right to have "improved living standards and to sustainable development "by stipulating main achievement of "development activities to improve the capacity of citizens for development and to meet their basic needs" (FDRE constitution Art 43(1) and (4)).

These policy directions seek to address citizens' standard of living that directly states to the availability of appropriate infrastructures, services and amenities; these policies also relate to sustainable development; that aspires for sustainable urban social development including children' rights to have healthy childhood growth, development, and quality education facilities. Since urban structural plan deals with the spatial nature of cities development, it also carries along residences equal right to benefit, to promote and participate citizens in the issues that address their life during planning, designing, and implementing. This directly connects the rights of children to have safe, nurturing, clean and conducive environment. These rights are the national and international policy agreement that every nation and every development agenda, that need to carry out the rights of children as a primary goal.

However, the content of these urban policies does not have specific preventions, precautions, and priorities for children in structural plans apart from giving a general statement that give attention for citizens social, economic, and environmental safety. In addition, when social services and infrastructures plans planned, designed and implemented special consideration for children and family is not included particularly infant preschool environment.

Moreover, the problem of preschools lack of proper planning is connected with the former structural plan. According to the education supervisors' explanation, the former structural plan of Addis Ababa (Addis Ababa City Development Plan, 2013-2023) did not include preschool infrastructure on the plan, because preschool was considered as informal education. It was following the promotion of ECCE in 2010 and the need of preschool platform for ECCE made the preschool to be included as a pre-primary in the formal education framework. As a result, the former structural plan did not include preschools in urban planning. This issue also contributed significantly affected the current spatial problem of preschools. In the current structural plan (Addis Ababa City Structural Plan, 2017-2027) preschools are listed as formal education system

under each sub city administration (Addis Ababa City Structural Plan, 2017-2027), however the issue of planning for preschool infrastructure remained the same.

4.1.2 Preschools Challenges in the Current Socio-spatial Planning Policy Context

After preschool was considered as a formal system, the burden was added to the primary system to accommodate preschool. That stretched primary schools to accommodate preschools in the formal system in the same primary school compounds. However, the private based preschools facilities remained as private business to find their own facility either in their private properties or rental places to provide preschool services.

This was also private preschool system owners' struggle operating in rental compound. The compounds are not made for children learning and teaching purpose. Such facilities are built either for hotel, private homes or business purpose. In order to cope up with facilitates expenses and secure profit. Private preschools prefer locations where the areas are dominated with kids and families that afford to pay. Still, the house rent is another challenge that push privates to move from place to place, and struggle to find suitable space and facilities with required standard for children care and education. Following this problem, families also suffer the distant location of kindergartens. Children travel distant and suffer traffic jam issues in the city, safety problems, and transportation costs. These problems frustrate children and affect their learning habits.

Data from school supervisors also argued that, lack of adequate preschool environment is shaping the learning and teaching approach in a wrong way. Children spent most of their preschool learning time in overcrowded classrooms with less mobility, no indoor play or activities. Outside of classrooms, there are limited outdoor play instruments like swings, slides round about, children play toys and other interactive game instruments. There is lack of adequate spaces for mobility in the class and enough spaces for napping rooms, which affect children' health and hygiene.

According to the policy documents of the official Syllabus of Kindergarten, early learning features are established under the major themes of: language development, social and emotional, behavioural development, environmental science, motor and mathematical skills (MOE, 2010). It commands the quality of the curriculum to be guided by ECCE standard in terms of including active learning, outdoor and indoor activities and play based learning and teaching method. The

core rule of this syllabus declared that teaching method must be by play and learning through play. Nevertheless, this could have been made possible only with the sufficient learning corners, outdoor engaging activities, available playground and physical environment purposely altered in preschool facilities.

However, according to urban planning sector officers' category data, ECCE policy or preschool learning requirements viewed as it has nothing to do with urban planning. They are education sector policies, On the other hand, data from children education regulatory participants argue that, it is the responsibility of urban planning office to evaluate the situation of the city and address preschools space challenges. Implementation of ECCE standard preschool service has become impossible without adequate space and location for school. The current locations and the environmental quality problems of preschool are some of the examples to this argument as planning failure to recognize the need of children infrastructure. According to data from this category, the above problem is not limited to preschool, but also the primary and secondary school sites and locations, as they are not appropriate to the schooling nature. The sites and locations planned for the schools are illegally taken by other investors, given to lease, hotels and commercial molls. This is also key struggle for primary school to secure sufficient space that was already planned for schools.

4.2 Institutional Role of Urban Planning and Preschool Institutes for Healthy Early

Learning Environment

Addis Ababa City Government Plan Revision Project Office has the mandated power to revise, evaluate and monitor the performance of the city plan (Regulation No. 43/2011), and adoption of effective urban plan that guide and set up the overall development of the city that ensures the participation and the common benefit of the people. The Project Office is authorized to revise the existing plans of the city in responses to city needs including social and economic by putting in place the effecting methods, practical guidelines and principles within the framework of the requirements of the Federal Urban Planning Proclamation No. 574/2008. In addition to the structural plan is revised and improved every five year (Addis Ababa City Structural Plan, 2017-2027:99-100).

Lack of accountability from urban planning institute and preschool regulatory and administration institutions with regards to addressing school environment problems exposed preschools system to be abandoned. The role of providing and facilitating children education is not merely preschools or urban planning responsibility. ECCE enforces the collaboration and partnership of institutions under their key roles to provide child-based services and build environment. This requires institutional and policy integration among urban design and planning and urban child education ministries. Thus, preschool facilities alone cannot answer or fulfil the quality of education, and childhood development policy placed by ECCE.

Considering the above policy, institutional and practice gap, reconsidering the vulnerability of children in urban planning is critical. While urban planning aspires towards sustainable urban social development; thriving to attaining sustainable urban development (Sustainable Development Goal #4 and # 11) of ensuring cities to be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Preschools are struggling to secure safe and decent environment. This is lack of critically asking the question of inclusiveness, and neglect of children rights in the process of conceptualization of urban designing, planning and implementation.

Moreover, like children education officers argue, inclusion of children education experts in urban planning is significant in advocating the rights of children and protecting children learning environment. Children education professionals should be consulted or included in the planning office, both professionals from each sectors need to plan and design the school areas, and location. It must be carefully examining ways to protect the environment from long-term and short- term multidirectional challenges that affect the decency and quality of children schooling places.

Thus, urban children education and urban planning policy strategies need to be synchronized and integrated with children rights and ECCE policy requirements in order to provide appropriate learning environment for infants. The structural plan of social service for education sector and facilities planning needs to place policy enforcement and aligned functional separate plan for preschool that can be translated and implemented at local urban development plans. So that, proper consideration and due attention need to be given to the sensitivity nature of infants and toddlers in structural plan (Addis Ababa City Structural Plan, 2017-2027).This is also a national and international policy agreement that placed on ECCE, it places requirements for children education

facilities and commands suitable environment that capacitate school to provide quality child education services that promotes healthy childhood growth, education and development (MoE, 2010). Ethiopia is one of the countries that are committed for these rights of children in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the African Charter for Children's Rights (ACCR), and the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, in accordance with the analytical framework and theoretical perspectives, to address preschools planning challenges in urban areas, urban planning needs a policy and planning intervention; for this outcome, ECCE working policy provides insight as well as quality measures that education sector and urban planning sector to work together in order to ensure the rights of children to have healthy, safe and enabling environment in preschool system. Preschool is not only an education facility, it is an environment where infants experience early years growth, learning and development, that need to be altered purposely to assist this stage or process of childhood to be productive and healthy. This stage has a lasting impact on children social, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and psychological capabilities. Thus, the following sections provide policy, institutional, practice and future research implications. It is based on the findings in terms of the contributions urban planning for preschool learning space challenges; and practical integration of preschool education polices, including ECCE and children rights in addressing the challenges preschool infrastructures in urban areas.

Policy Implications

Lack of the policy integration in urban socio-spatial planning and preschool education institutions is inducing multidimensional problems to early learning environment. Thus, preschool system is unable to meet the standard that early learning environment requires for healthy infant early learning due to lack of institutional and policy power. This calls these sectors integration and updated policy approach that connects both sectors to give priority for children rights to have safe, enabling and decent learning environment. Beyond that, urban socio-spatial planning contains principles and proclamations including institutional, policy and sectoral autonomy to respond to early learning environment need in accordance with ECCE standards. These roles are allocation of proper place for children education and care system that directly related with addressing needs

of society, safety of citizens and children rights to have clean, nurturing and conducive environment. These principles and guidelines of urban planning are placed on proclamation 574/ 2008 that every urban planning initiation and preparation to comprise to such urban planning principles.

Thus, revision and updating of urban plans need to response to children learning space needs. This is the promise and principle of urban planning policy in proclamation 574/ 2008 (FDRE Proclamation 574/2008). Based on that, during upgrading of structural plan children education infrastructure needs have to be included by applying the effective methods, guidelines and principles of children rights and ECCE requirements.

Institutional and Practice Implications

The availability and provision of high quality early learning environment should not only be placed in preschool sector. Institutional cooperation of urban planning and education sector is required. Lack of institutional cooperation left the problem of preschool space challenges to be abandoned. As a result, bridging institutional gaps is required by including children education professionals in urban planning institute in order to advocate and protect children rights in every decision made in urban planning. Due to lack of this, preschools remained to practice in unfavorable environment and consistently suffer urbanization induced problems. Children education sector require promoting ECCE and children rights that provide common understanding of the value of early learning environment and preschool infrastructure. Lack of such approach contributed to misconception of ECCE and the value of preschool learning spaces in urban planning sectors. This also brought about failing of taking responsibility and accountability in both sectors for the preschools environmental difficulties. ECCE puts accountability on institutions and agencies to be responsible for early learning and development environment needs. It has a comprehensive approach in policies, programs and requires the cooperation of all parties around children: including urban planning and children education institutions (MOE, 2010). Thus, implementation of ECCE in preschool education system requires integrated policies that bring cooperation and partnership among these institutions, to strengthen and collaborate their services.

Future Study Area

This study reveals on how lack of quality early learning environment exposed infants for lasting effects on children growth and development. And how providing ECCE standard infant learning requires altering quality-built space and preschool facilities, which urban planning key role is needed. Thus, failing to respond to this need bring multidimensional crises in children growth, education and development. The impacts also extend to their later school process such as school success, and future life. It also brings emotional, behavioral, social, academic and psychological related impacts. As a future study area, this study recommends that, based on these study findings, longitudinal result tracking research is needed in the context of Ethiopia; taking cases or samples from both private and public preschools. These kinds of researches can reveal the longitudinal impact of unfavorable environmental situations and well-built environment of preschool education experiences on the selected children starting from early ages. To show how such impacts are extend to their youth or adolescent ages. Preschools also can do these types of research on students by keeping their tracks, doing assessments and evaluations on the above factors, and maintaining files of their performances, their personalities and capabilities at each level.

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Ethical Clearance

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