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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ANALYSIS OF THE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION IN MUMBAI, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood is the most crucial period in the development of an individual so it is important that a child gets a conducive and a stimulating environment in the crucial periods of his/her life, which would enable him/her to thrive. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is assuming importance for the holistic development of very young child. Case study approach was formulated for this study. Five ECE Teacher training programs were randomly selected and analyzed on pedagogical aspects. The results show that there marked variation in duration of training. The curriculum content of the existing ECE teacher education programs lacks relevance. Many training colleges do not emphasize enough on developmentally appropriate practices. It is concluded that Government policy with respect to pre-school education should be formulated, implemented and regulated. Age of admission to this course should be increased to 18 years and minimum qualification should be of class XII. The training atmosphere should be flexible, warm and permissive. The universities, which are implementing self-financing courses, may also be encouraged to opt for this model.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is the most crucial period in the development of an individual. Even neuroscience confirms that these years from the 'critical' period for the development of linguistic and psychosocial competencies. It is important that a child gets a conducive and a stimulating environment in the crucial periods of his/her life, which would enable him/her to thrive. According to the 2011 census, there are 158.7 million children in India in the age group of 0-6 years. Therefore there is a need for professionally qualified teachers to optimize development. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is assuming importance for the holistic development of very young child. Many would also attribute such an early childhood education as preparatory ground for schooling in the later years. The teachers who impart this education need to be aware of the importance of these years in the life of the young child. There is a wide spectrum of teachers training provisions in India, there are marked variations as well, which reduce the scope for any standardization or quality control of ECE training initiatives (Aggarwal, and Gupta, 2007). Integrated approach to pre-primary school teacher education is the logical outcome of the thinking in recent years regarding the attempt towards providing integrated services for the preschool child. Combining health, nutrition, education and welfare services in a meaningful manner and offering a package deal to the pre-

primary school child would entail developing a cadre of trained workers at the professional and para-professional levels. For the successful implementation of the program, resources will be required by the way of trained personnel as well as physical facilities. Ultimately, the success of these programs will be determined by the quality of the teacher who will deal with the preschoolers, their parents and the community workers, in a day to day interaction.

The presence of a number of programs of child care and education services necessitates proper provision for training the personnel (Murlidharan, 1969). Varied types of training facilities are available to suit the need of both regular as well as ad hoc. There are wide variations in curriculum and methods. There are two year training programs, and also short-term training programs. The minimum qualification for the training also varies significantly. Some courses are highly theoretical and academic where as a few are of practical oriented. There is wide variation in the training procedures followed both in content as well as pedagogy. A glance at the structure of the courses available, it is noticed that these ECE courses are not only of shorter duration but also lack the opportunity of transforming the class room based learning experiences into real context. The ultimate result is that most of the ECE teacher's are unable to translate and implement their training inputs into classroom practices. Further, several studies speak about the truth that privately managed teacher training institutions have either not come up properly or they have not been functioning efficiently and effectively. Further,

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Table 1. Pedagogical Aspects at a Glance

Course	Minimum Educational Eligibility	Duration of Training	Methodology	Exposure to Theory	Exposure to Practicals
IGNOU	XII	1 Year	Lecture	Adequate	Inadequate
ICDS	No Bar	3 Months	Lecture	Inadequate	Nil
ECCE Diploma	Class XII	1 Year	Lecture/Demonstration	Adequate	Adequate
Certificate Course	Class X	6 Months	Lecture	Inadequate	Nil
PG Diploma	Graduation	2 Years	Lecture/Demonstration	Adequate	Adequate

many of them have not yet developed a professional work culture that may enable them towards quality improvement. It has also been pointed out in studies that the kinds of faculty placed or recruited in these institutions are questionable. This is substantiated by the fact that in quite a few institutions, there is hardly any recruitment or placement policy. Very often B.Ed teacher trainees double up as trainees for ECCE students. There is also a popular perception that special training is not necessary for teachers of pre-primary and nursery schools as their job simply involves teaching of alphabets, numbers etc, and taking care of young children. It is felt that any person who has passed higher secondary or senior secondary examination can easily handle the job of nursery teacher (Pankajam, 2005). Even any person who has caring temperament towards children, or who herself is mother, will be a good staff member in early childhood programs. It is because of this perception that untrained teachers are posted in a majority of nursery schools in the unrecognized private sector. Nearly over three-quarters of teachers engaged in ECE have not received any type of pedagogical training. There exist tendencies to recruit untrained or poorly qualified teachers, which often have serious consequences for pre schooling quality (NCTE, 2004). Needless to say, these assumptions are professionally not sound and need to be corrected. Educating the community to be more selective and /or demanding as consumers, which could serve as an effective monitoring device of ECE in private sector. This awareness aspect needs to be promoted using different modes of mass media during XI Five Year Plan.

Though Program of Action (POA) 1992 and NCTE draft approach paper, 2004 had recommended of having different courses of ECCE at certificate, diploma and postgraduate diploma level, yet existing programs have not accommodated these needs. It might be due to the fact of absence of ECE as a subject in any of the social science faculties in Indian Universities. Thus, there seems a urgent need to bring up the Universities, Institutes and other centers of higher learning in teacher education within the realm of ECE also. Due to lack of employment opportunities of the products of ECE teacher training, the system has not grown up in proportion of increase of ECE centers. The employment opportunity of ECE trained teacher is only available in private sector, where most of the cases, service conditions are often deplorable. The number of available posts of trained nursery teachers in the government sector in almost all the states are negligible, Further, as there has been no demand for trained staff in ECE, so none of the state government has laid down any norms for staff qualifications or remuneration, nor any guidelines for recognition of ECE staff as teacher. Low salary, no professional recognition and lack of regulations are the main drawbacks for the ECCE profession in India. This paper looks into a few ECE teacher training courses in Mumbai on pedagogical aspects like duration of training, methodology, and exposure to theory and practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Case study approach was formulated for the study. Five ECE Teacher training programs were randomly selected and analyzed on pedagogical aspects like duration of training, methodology, and exposure to theory and practice. ECCE Courses, IGNOU, ICDS, PG Diploma ECCE, ECCE Diploma, and Certificate Courses were selected for this study.

RESULTS

A glance at the structure of early childhood teacher training programs shows that it lacks both academic rigor and professionalism. Hardly any attempt is made to the true meaning of early teaching learning repertoire (a set of skills, strategies, methods, knowledge and understanding) presumed valid for achieving preferential learning outcomes. It is noticed that these ECE courses are not only of shorter duration but also lack the opportunity of transforming the class room based learning experiences into real context. The ultimate result is that most of the ECE teacher's falls downward from the depths of what they learned during their training inputs. Though appropriate curricular guidelines are available in the country for ECE; the reality is that there is a large gap between what is prescribed or suggested and what is practiced. Typically, the activities of pre-school education under ICDS are conducted for a period ranging from 45 minutes to two hours duration daily, with minimal play and learning material support. Though, unprepared and untrained status of ECE worker is the root cause of this phenomenon.

The results show that there marked variation in duration of training. It varies from a few days to a fortnight to relatively longer time frame (as in two years) for the integrated training. While minimum educational eligibility criteria ranges from no bar (as in case of Anganwadi Workers) to primary standard (as in case of crèche workers) to high school to class XII (as in case of IGNOU and Integrated Preprimary and Primary Teachers Training). In case of several NGOs which run their own courses for internal consumptions only) to fortnight (as in case of ICDS) to relatively larger time framework (as two years in case of Integrated Preprimary and primary teachers training, one to four years in case of IGNOU program). Analyzing the results it was found that the curriculum being followed is self developed by the institution therefore was inadequate. Classroom teaching was normally through lecture and discussion methods. Use of audio-teaching aids was minimum. Exposure to theory was inadequate for the certificate course. ICDS also had inadequate exposure to theory. It was found that the ECCE component was not sufficient with only four days allotted to it. Similarly exposure to practical also varied from course to course. ECCE course necessarily should have hands on training for classroom teaching. Courses that do not provide training in classroom

teaching do not help the teacher trainee to develop skills related to teaching and handling the class and creating an appropriate developmentally learning environment.

Pedagogical Aspects

Taking advantage of absence of minimum accepted guidelines for teacher preparation curriculum of ECE, most of these institutions have adopted different curriculum from their own point of view, which has superficial theoretical connotation and practical knowledge having varying evaluation mechanisms and expectations from student-teachers. The curriculum content of the existing ECE teacher education programs by and large, lacks relevance and state based context specificity. Documentation and case studies of best practices in training needs to be prepared for wide dissemination, replication as well as to feed into the training process itself. Many training colleges do not emphasize enough on developmentally appropriate practices as per the latest research in brain development and appropriate stimulation. Due to lack of employment opportunities of the products of ECE teacher training, the system has not grown up in proportion of increase of ECE centers.

Conclusion

Overall quality on the nursery education whether being provided by one organization or the other can be improved only when its problem and shortcomings are assessed and steps are taken to deal with these problems in a holistic manner. For this following measures are suggested: Government policy with respect to pre-school education should be formulated, implemented and regulated. Objectives of preschool teacher training education, norms, curriculum, learning methodologies, activities etc should be defined keeping in view the real conceptual basis of this program. Regular in service training programs should be organized by schools for up-gradation of knowledge. Focus of these programs should be on providing training in conducting development oriented activities and innovative practices. The course design of these in-service programs should be revised keeping in mind the needs of pre-school teachers.

Age of admission to this course should be increased to 18 years and minimum qualification should be of class XII. The training atmosphere should be flexible, warm and permissive. Young adults can develop into successful teachers only if their own personalities are permitted to expand and flourish in relationships with children and others in the school and community. The student teacher must develop the concepts, methods and attitudes that are more meaningful to her. The scope of education departments located in universities and other institutes of higher learning needs to be widened so that they not only take up the training task of teachers from ECE to secondary stage through diverse ways of different certification level (certificate, diploma, bachelor and master degree) but also discharge their responsibilities in research and extension dimension of ECE too. They need to assist in widening the conceptual base for ECE courses so that the principle of continuum of childhood development is firmly integrated and informs the approach to ECE workers/ teachers. NIPCCD and NCERT may provide a torch-bearing role in this regard by adopting cascade model and by imparting training to trainers of these Institutes. The universities, which are implementing self-financing courses, may also be encouraged to opt for this model. They may be provided grants for this purpose by the centre.

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