



Pedagogogy of Learning, Vol. 2, Issue-1, pp. 17-22 (E), Jan 2016
(International Journal of Education)
E-ISSN: 2395-7344, P-ISSN: 2320-9526 , Abstracted and Indexed in
Google Scholar, ResearchBib, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),
Scientific Indexing Services (SIS), WorldCat, DRJI; **Impact Factor: 0.787**

Recommended Citation:

Srichandan, M. and Behera, L. (2016). Pre-school teacher training programme of Odisha and strategies for quality improvement. *Pedagogogy of Learning*, 2 (1), 17-22.

Pre-School Teacher Training Programme of Odisha and Strategies for Quality Improvement

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Article Received: 14-12-2015

Article Revised : 11-01-2016

Article Accepted : 20-01-2016

Abstract: *Preschool teacher education programme is one of the neglected components in India. The present paper reports the status of pre-school teacher education programme of Odisha. The status of the teacher training programme in preschool teacher education institutions has been determined on the basis of views of teacher educators working in different institutions i.e. Nursery Teacher Education Institutions and certificate courses of preschool education. The curriculum in each of the institution has been juxtaposed taking into account the guidelines and directives envisaged by the NCTE Curriculum Framework (1998 and 2005). The participants of the present study consisted of 80 trainees, 50 teacher educators from ten preschool teacher education institutions of Odisha. Five experts/educationists from teacher training colleges and University also participated in the study. To collect data for the present study four tools were used namely: Questionnaire for teacher educators and heads; Questionnaire for experts and focus Group Discussion format. Case study has been adopted to substantiate the data. Only a few numbers of private institutions are running NTT and certificate courses. These institutions are mainly concentrated in urban areas. The syllabus developed by the sampled institutions are different and do not confirm to NCTE guidelines. Practical component is one of the weakest links and in many institutions the course outline does not indicate in detail about the transaction of practical activities. As suggested by experts the curriculum should constitute three broad components: (a) theory courses, supplemented with practical content; (b) practicum, i.e. self learning/development; and (c) school internship, i.e. Engagement with children in preschool. The theory and practicum courses shall be assigned a weightage in the proportion determined by the affiliating body. The classroom pedagogy and processes should be interactive and participatory, with a focus on inclusive classroom approach, tutorials and mentoring.*

Keywords: *Pre-School Teacher Training Programme, Quality Improvement, Classroom Pedagogy, Inclusive Classroom Approach, Tutorials and Mentoring.*

Introduction

There is now an increasingly realization in the country that Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) not only lays the foundation for the wholesome development of Child's personality but also prepares ground. For the achievement of SSA goals by ensuring school readiness among young children which not only leads to this enrolment but also ensures their retention in the formal school. The 86th Amendment Act, 2002 of our constitution has split the age group 0-14 years into two clear categories and put them under separate Articles in the constitution. Article 21A inserted after Article 21, which reads as "The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age group 6-14 years in such manner as the state may, by law determine," has made elementary education a fundamental right of citizens. The Article 45 under Directive principle of state policy now reads as "the state shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years".

The past few decades have witnessed an unprecedented expansion of early childhood education (Nursery/Kindergarten) in the country. The expansion of ECCE has implication for ECCE teacher education. But ECCE teacher education now a days is an unregulated area of professional education (NCTE, 2005). The curriculum is instrumental in equipping the training with professional knowledge, skills and values. After the passage of 86th constitution amendment act (2002) maximum emphasis has been laid on preschool education and preschool teacher education. The curriculum varies from institution to institution. National council for Teacher Education (NCTE) developed a curriculum framework in 1998 which outlined the basic curricular guidelines, entry qualification and other essentials of teacher education programme in the country. Similarly the NCTE developed draft curriculum framework and guidelines on ECCE teacher education in the year 2005. In India the number of preschool teachers training institutions is less.

The following studies conducted in the area of elementary and secondary teacher education curriculum have relevance for pre-school teacher education programme in the country. Mastudaira (1982) evaluated pre-service teacher education through questionnaire sent to beginning teachers and found that many considered pre-service education to be weak in practical knowledge and technique which is the main focus of the teacher education programme. Srivastava (1982) reported that, teaching efficiency of trainees having professional knowledge is higher than trainees having no professional knowledge. Immediately desired changes in the pre-service teacher education programme were in its curriculum organisation of practice teaching, admission and evaluation procedure, establishment of independent college of education, teacher educators, and orientation and research facilities. Joshi (1997) concludes in 'Fifth Survey of Researches in Education' that in the teacher education syllabus, there is more emphasis on theory and less emphasis on practical. Yadav (2003) from his study concluded that the pre-service teacher education curriculum of different institutions are not being able to meet the emerging demands of school curriculum and the culture of research and innovations are not promoted among teacher educators and teacher education institutions. Behera and Basantia (2005) from their study found that to some extent the pre-service elementary teacher education syllabus of Orissa confirms to NCTE guidelines. The syllabus of the state gives more emphasis on theory component than practical and practicum. Das (1992) found that the positive impact of curriculum of one year JBT programme on developing proper attitude towards teaching in student teachers. Studies conducted by Srivastav (1982), Das (1992) show the benefits of teacher education programme. However Mastudira (1982) Yadav (2003), Joshi (1997), Behera (2005) pointed to the inherent limitations of teacher education programme because of

the curriculum it offers. However these studies are mostly focusing elementary or secondary teacher education programme.

Curriculum is found as one of the weakest link in the programme. In study conducted by Ambedkar University and NCTE(2014) found large scale variations in pre-school teacher education programmes. In this context the present study has been taken with the following questions in mind. What are the limitations of preschool teacher education programme in Odisha? How far the present preschool teacher education curriculum in different institutions of Odisha confirms to the NCTE guidelines? As teacher educators are directly involved in the pre-school teacher education programme it is worthwhile to seek their expert views of an different aspect of the curriculum.

Operational Definitions of the Terms Used

Teacher Training Programme for Preschool Education: The teacher training programme for pre-school education refers to the programme followed in pre-school teacher training institutions and Nursery teacher education institutions. In the present study it refers to the training programme of Nursery Teacher's Training (NTT), as well as diploma level courses for preparation of teachers at ECCE (0-6) age group.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the present status of preschool teacher education programme in Odisha.
2. To find out to what extent the preschool teacher education programme of Odisha confirms to the existing guidelines prescribed by NCTE.
3. To examine the views of trainees, teacher educators and experts on preschool teacher education programme in Odisha i.e. curriculum, duration, assessment strategies adopted.
4. To suggest appropriate steps for quality assurance in pre-school teacher training programmes

Research Questions

1. What is the present status of preschool teacher education programme in the state of Odisha?
2. Does the preschool teacher education programme confirm to the NCTE guidelines?
3. How do the preschool teacher educators, experts and trainees perceive the present syllabus of preschool teacher education in the state?

Methodology

Design: As the present study seeks to determine the present status of the preschool teacher education programme, the descriptive survey method has been adopted to accomplish the study. The status of the teacher training programme in preschool teacher education institutions has been determined on the basis of views of teacher educators working in different institutions i.e. Nursery Teacher Education Institutions and certificate courses of preschool education. The curriculum in each of the institution has been juxtaposed taking into account the guidelines and directives envisaged by the NCTE Curriculum Framework (1998 and 2005). Case study have been adopted to substantiate the data.

Participants: The participants of the present study consisted of 80 trainees, 50 teacher educators from ten preschool teacher education institutions of Odisha. Besides the 5

experts/educationists from Teacher Training Colleges and University also participated in the study by providing their expert views on pre-school teacher education programme.

Materials: To collect data for the present study four tools were developed by the investigators namely :

- a. Questionnaire for teacher educators and heads
- b. Questionnaire for experts.
- c. Focus Group Discussion format
- d. Case study format

Data Collection and Analysis: The investigators collected data from the field personally. The questionnaire developed by the investigators was administered on participants. While administration of questionnaire on Teacher educators (n=40) and institutions head (n=10) took on average 45 minutes. For each FGD the time devoted was more than one hour. The collected data have been analysed qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

Major Findings

- (i) The preschool teacher education programme in Orissa is in the infancy stage. Only a few numbers of private institutions are running NTT and certificate courses. These institutions are mainly concentrated in urban areas of Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Sambalpur, Rourkela only. The syllabus developed by the sampled institutions are different and do not confirm to NCTE guidelines. As the institutions are privately managed without any recognition there is no monitoring mechanism.
- (ii) The study found a wide range in duration across courses. For example in some institution it is nine months and in much institution it is one year course. As the institutions are not recognized there is no quality check for standard in term of number of contact days and hours.
- (iii) Most of the teacher educators felt competent enough to teach all the papers of their respective institutions. Only two teacher educator opined that she needs orientation on practical/internship.
- (iv) Eighty percent of teacher educators viewed merit and entrance as the best criteria for admitting students to preschool teacher education programme.
- (v) The teacher educators opined that the NTT should of one year duration and half of them responded that the certificate course should be of one year duration. Majority of them opined that entry qualification for NTT and certificate course to be +2 and matriculation respectively.
- (vi) 60% of teacher educators agreed the theory-practical weight age to be 60-40. More than 30% of them felt it should be 50-50 weight age. More than 90% of teacher educators felt inadequacy of library facilities in their institution. However classrooms are adequate enough as per their views.
- (vii) Overall the lecture method with blackboard teaching was the most common (50%) method. Project based approaches and field visits are used by 18% and 16% of teacher educators respectively. ICT based strategies are used by one tenth of teacher educators. The results also revealed that 40 teacher educators (80%) viewed that the existing syllabus of their institution is practicable in the prevailing conditions of the state.

However, 10 teacher educators (20%) viewed that the present syllabus of their institution are not practicable enough in the existing conditions of the society.

- (viii) For quality improvement it was suggested by experts that the age range of the clientele i.e. 2-6,3-6,3-8 need to be taken care of while preparing the syllabus. In most of the institutions(as these are not recognized)the curriculum does not take in to account NCTE norms and standards. Many organizations like NCERT,NIOS,IGNOU,NIPCCD have developed materials and these can be learning resource for trainees. These can also guide for development of courses.
- (ix) Practical component is one of the weakest link and in many institutions the course outline does not indicate in detail about the transaction of practical activities. Each theory paper may be developed and related hands on experience, project and assignments need to be incorporated in order to make a sound curriculum.
- (x) As suggested by experts the curriculum should constitute three broad components: (a) theory courses, supplemented with practical content; (b) practicum, i.e. self learning/development; and (c) school internship, i.e. engagement with children in preschool. The theory and practicum courses shall be assigned a weigh age in the proportion determined by the affiliating body. However, it would be desirable to maintain the equal ratio between the theory component on one hand and the practicum and school internship on the other.
- (xi) The classroom pedagogy and processes should be interactive and participatory, with a focus on inclusive classroom approach, tutorials, mentoring and use of blended methods". Experts suggested the need for a government policy in ECCE for regulation and approval of all kinds of ECCE centres and programmes in the country. It was suggested that the curriculum should follow a common structure with diverse contents taking in to account local needs

Delimitations

The curriculum of NTT and certificate course in ECCE has been examined in reference to NCTE Framework (1998, 2005). The views of 80 student teachers, 40 teacher educators,10 heads and 5 experts form the basis of appraisal of preschool teacher education curriculum in Odisha. The present study was purposively concentrated to ten preschool teacher education institutions of urban areas of Bhubaneswar, Sambalpur, Cuttack and Balasore only. The number of teacher education and experts whose view has been collected is too meagre to formulate broad generalization. Two appraise a programme only on view of teacher educators and experts may not be good enough to draw valid conclusion.

Conclusions

The last few decades have seen an unprecedented growth in the education sector in terms of its expansion and coverage, culminating in the Right to Education (RTE) Act in April 2010. This landmark legislation has made elementary education a fundamental right of every child in India. The government should, as part of its Teacher Education Policy, promote expansion of high quality teacher education institutions for ECCE through its own initiatives and/or through encouragement of the private and NGO sectors, with a view to ensure more equitable distribution of ECCE teacher education programmes in all states of the country, especially in states where none exist at present. This could be done through Setting up ECCE programs in the DIETs,ETEIs which will ensure both equitable distribution and continuity with primary teacher education, monitring the quality of ECCE teacher preparation

programme, encouraging higher learning institutions and SCERT to develop model curriculum for the state for preparation of teachers for ECCE stage. Paper wise objectives may be framed while revising the syllabus. SCERT, Odisha may develop a model preschool teacher education syllabus to maintain quality and standard of preschool teacher education programme in the state. The respective institutions should form expert committee to review the curriculum. The curriculum of all institutions immediate review and modification. Adequate infrastructure and equipments may be developed by respective institutions,

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