

CURRICULUM AND PRACTICES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION -A CONCERN

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ABSTRACT

The last few decades has seen an unprecedented expansion of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in terms of pre-school education facilities in the country, both in government and non-government sector. This expansion has, however not ensured quality control in these programmes which are observed to function as having a curriculum which is a downward extension of primary schools. Often what is practiced is the name of ECE is not necessarily what has been envisaged in the National Policy. In view of the present scenario provision of good quality ECE cannot be ensured. In Meghalaya, as far as curriculum is concerned, there is no prescribed curriculum by the government and pre-schools follow different pattern often geared to the demands of parental pressure and expectations of primary schools. Keeping in mind these concerns the investigators felt the need to investigate the Curriculum and Practices for Early Childhood Education in East and West Khasi Hills District, of Meghalaya.

Keywords: Curriculum; Practices; Early Childhood Education; Pre-School education

Introduction

The National Curriculum Framework (2005) states that "The first 6 years of a child's life are globally acknowledged to be the most critical years for lifelong development since the pace of development in these years is extremely rapid". Globally many events have contributed to the realization of the significance of early childhood years for a country's economic progress.

The Indian **National Policy of Education 1986** has defined the concept of Early Childhood Education (ECE) as the activities which foster and promote the balanced development of the child in the age-group of 3-6 years in all dimensions which are interrelated domains and have been collectively described as Early Childhood Education. According to Kaul, (2009) Early Childhood Education or Pre-School Education or Pre-Primary Education programmes are the educational programmes for children of 3 to 6 years (as seen in anganwadis, nurseries, pre-schools, kindergartens, etc). While in the long term perspective, it serves to provide a sound foundation for all round development of the child, it has also proved to be an effective input for primary schooling.

ECCE Curriculum Framework 2012; Ministry of Women and Child Development; Government of India develop a curriculum framework that is in line with the vision of ECE as spelt out in the National ECCE policy and is a broad Framework of basic guidelines for Curricular goals, programme content, classroom practices, and teacher preparation across different provisions and across all regions. The purpose of this open framework is to promote quality and excellence in ECE by providing guidelines for practices that would promote optimum learning and development to all young children.

Rationale of the Study

The last few decades has seen an unprecedented expansion of ECE in terms of pre-school education facilities in the country, both in government and non-government sector. This expansion has, however not ensured quality control in these programmes which are observed to function as having curriculum which is a downward extension of primary schools. In some cases the programmes tend to remain merely custodial in nature and do not at all meet the objectives of a pre-school education programme.

In the same context of Meghalaya, as far as curriculum is concerned, there is no prescribed curriculum by the government and different pre-schools follow different pattern often mostly geared to the demands of parental pressure and expectations of primary schools. The practices not only is damaging to child's learning but leading to poor academic performance. Thus, the study attempts to examine the curriculum and its practices as per the objectives of Early Childhood Education as laid down by various policies and to find out the quality of Early Childhood Education of our region.

Statement of the Problem

From the above discussion, the problem of the study is entitled as: “Curriculum and Practices for Early Childhood Education: A Concern”

Objectives of the Study:-

To find out the curriculum followed by pre-schools with respect to practices and programme schedule of the pre-school programme.

Operational definition of the terms used:-

Curriculum- an organized framework of content in which teaching & learning occurs.

Practices- refer to methods of teaching and activities of the pre-school programme.

Early Childhood Education- refers to the learning experiences that are provided to early childhood years.

Pre-School education- It is a programme for 3 to 6 years old children who are in pre-primary school for 2-3 years of informal education before Class 1.

Delimitation of the study: -

The Study is delimited to pre-primary schools of East & West Khasi Hills Districts of Meghalaya.

Methodology

Descriptive Survey Method was used for the study. A representative sample was drawn randomly that comprises of pre-primary schools of East & West Khasi Hills Districts of Meghalaya.

Districts	Pre-Primary Schools Teachers			Total
	Govt.	Govt.Aided	Private	
East Khasi Hills	20	103	35	158
West Khasi Hills	19	105	30	154
Total	39	208	65	312

The tools used for the study are: -

Questionnaire for Heads of Schools and Questionnaire for Pre –School Teachers

The source of data collection comprised of both Primary and Secondary sources collected from all the respondents and from official documents, policy documents, surveys, reports, books, journals, etc. Data was collected through the Questionnaires and were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively using percentage method.

Review of Related Literature

In this section, the main findings of earlier related studies are arranged under themes as:-Pattanayak, (2017); Khader, (2017); Vishnu, (2017); Mangla, (2010); Shahjamal and Samir, (2008); Mary, (1988) studied the development aspects and importance of curriculum. Kapur, (2017); Yadav, (2014); Cross (2013); Subhash, Suresh and Ram, (2010); Bevil, (1974) studies were on the medium of instruction. Studies on programme planning were found conducted by Rao, (2015); Obeng, (2010); Pandey, (2008); Kariyil and Sunny, (2001); Pandey, (1989); which aims in finding out the planning of activities at the pre-school centres. Kaushal, (2014); Parua, (2012); Soni, (2011); Subhash, Suresh & Ram (2010) Ruth, (2002); Kaul, et al, (1992); Murthy, (1992); Lin and Meichung, (1992); Nagalakshmi, (1991); Mishra, (1990); Seshamma and Karanam, (1986); Khosla and Kataria, (1984-86); Mallya, (1982); Kumar, (1979) studies were on pedagogical aspects where the findings revealed that the practiced pedagogy at the pre-schools was mostly based on play and child centeredness. Sharma, R (2006) Mishra (1990) Khosla & Kataria (1984-86) Kumar (1979) studies found that pre-schools teach more of academics (teaching of 3R's) and were reduced to rote method.

From the review of related literature it can be said that a number of studies have been reviewed, the approach, methodology differs from one context to another with however the findings generally stresses on the importance of good quality pre-school programme.

Results and Discussion

It was found that high percentages (74%) of pre-primary schools were recognized by the govt. of Meghalaya but without financial assistance from the Government. (Rajalakshmi, 1992). The findings show that majority of the Pre-Primary schools have linkages with primary schools as attached to a primary school. This is in line with a study conducted by Mistry, Kaul and Dhar, (1986) and Kaul and Sankar, (2009) which implies that Meghalaya has extensive pre- primary school provision.

The programme in a majority (68%) of the Pre-Primary schools was found to be in consistent with the objectives as specified for pre-school education and the programme include all aspects for the overall development of a child. This finding was similar to the finding of Syiem, (2009) but it is contrary to the observation and finding of Deka,(1982) which highlighted the absence of no clear policy or direction by state government in respect of pre-school.

The findings of the study reveal that the Pre-Primary schools do not have a prescribed curriculum to be followed uniformly; the finding is unsatisfactory when considered in the context of quantitative expansion in pre-school education, Maiyani, (1989). In the absence of a central authority as NCERT, SCERT prescribing curriculum, the school curriculum is found to be heavily loaded with academics. Rather, it has turned out to be mere downward extension of primary school curriculum. This finding seemingly is in agreement with the study findings of Dehadroy, (2007), Pheko, (2012) and Shahjamal and Samir, (2008).

With regard to the duration of the Pre-Primary school programme, it is found that at the programme ranges from either a two year or three year programme. The daily time schedule in majority of the Pre-Primary schools accounts for 4 to 5 hours daily. (Mishra, 1990 and Taggart et.al, 2013).

Study findings also reveal that majority of the Pre-Primary schools were provided with the services of health that was extended to by the Government Health Department. It may also be stated that nutritional services were not provided at the Pre-Primary schools. Findings similar to Choudhary, (2012). Financial assistance was found to be provided by the government to a small percentage (25%) of the Pre-Primary schools (govt. and govt. aided) as salary of teachers only; and this finding agrees with Kumar, (1968) and Singh and Singh, (2015).

The study found that majority of the Pre-Primary schools teachers (76%) plan activities before conducting them. This finding was similar to the finding by Mary, (1988). However the planning for the flow or connection of one activity to another activity was found only in few Pre-Primary schools (26%).

The study further reveals that a majority of the Pre-Primary schools maintains a balance in pre-school programme, between the activities such as group & individual activities; outdoor & indoor activities; large & small activities; active & quiet activities; This finding indicates the compliance of MWCD Quality Standards for ECCE, (2013).

The investigator found that the Pre-Primary schools conducted activities for the overall development of the child with respect to the development of physical & motor, language, social and emotional development, mental development and creativity development. This finding was similar to findings of Srivastava and Singh, (2007) and Quality Standards for ECCE, (2013). However it can be said that there exists a variation as regards to the type of activities conducted as well as the choice of activities.

It can be said that the Pre-Primary schools were found concentrating more on activities for mental development. Activities on creativity development that involves nature study, was conducted in very less percentages and this is in agreement with the proposition of Soni, (2006), Kariyil and Sunny, (2001) and Sharma, (2015) which stated that nature education is not followed by teachers as part of the pre-primary curriculum.

Further it maybe be added that the outdoor activities were conducted once or twice a week while the duration of outdoor activities was confined to be to a time period of less than 40 minutes in a majority of the Pre-Primary schools and this finding is strongly inclined to the findings of Kariyil and Sunny, (2001), Subhash, Suresh and Ram, (2010) underlining the important role of play- outdoor and indoor for overall development of children.

The findings revealed that activities performed by Pre-Primary schools on the development of memory and observation and on the development of senses were less .However majority of the Pre-Primary schools conducted activities with regards to the development of writing & reading skills in high percentages (above 70%), a finding which relates to that of Srivastava and Singh,(2007).

It was found that in almost all the Pre-Primary schools children are allowed to express themselves in their home language or mother tongue while they gradually acquire the school language (Khasi/ Hindi/English). The finding is in consistent with the study findings of Kapur, (2017).

On the medium of instruction, the study reveals that majority of the Pre-Primary schools adopts Khasi (63%) and very few used English as the medium. In the backdrop, it may be stated that language development is very important as it is at this stage (Bevli, 1974).

The general approach followed/adopted in the classroom by majority of Pre-Primary schools was found to be activity based method (Ruth, 2002), play-way method & child centred approach (Soni, 2011 and Srivastava and Singh, 2007). On contrary, teacher centred approach, oral instruction, blackboard method were also adopted. This finding was similar to the finding of Parua, (2012) and Mialaret, (1976)

It was found that homework was given to children by majority of Pre-Primary schools teachers (96%). This finding was in contrary to the finding of Kaushal, (2014) and Mangla, (2010) with regard to homework that should be prohibited at pre-primary stage.

It was also revealed that a high percentage of Pre-Primary schools (80%) strictly focus their attention to the learning of 3Rs method which in turn reflects that the Pre-Primary schools focussed more towards academic achievement which was not as stated in policy documents (MWCD Curriculum Framework, (2013), NCF, (2005)

Implications and Recommendations

The study outcome has been revealing and thought provoking in view of serious implications that it entails. It implies that in the absence of State Policies the road map is conspicuous by its absence. The private sector which is still completely unregulated has shown increase in public demands and now covers probably more children than other programmes. In this connection it is mandatory that the state government formulates and/ or adopts the National ECCE policy to bring in parity in quality standards and curriculum framework. In the context of the observations and findings highlighted above there is a strong implication that the basis and foundation of the edifice of ECCE is weak and crumbling.

It maybe stated that a sorry state of affairs in ECE programme has been due to the absence of a common prescribed curriculum to be followed uniformly by the different pre-school programme in the State and no teacher's manual and guidebook. The focus of the educational content points to learning of 3Rs which appears as a downward extension of first grade elementary level curriculum. The practices adopted, that is heavily loaded with academics it may be implied may have detrimental consequences on learning of children.

Recommendation

There is a need to integrate pre-school education or early childhood pre-primary education to ECCE. It is imperative that the government take up the responsibility in controlling the mushrooming of poor quality ECE programme through appropriate regulatory processes. While the government cannot deny its responsibility in the field of financial resource, it could also develop various strategies to enhance funding.

It is in urgent need that the State develops a uniform Curriculum framework in line with the objectives of ECCE for specific age group i.e. for 3 to 6 year. Responsibility of curriculum design should be handed over to the committee of experts and it should be mandatory to follow the same with limited flexibility. In this context, the NCERT has come up with two documents 'Guidelines for Pre-School Education' and Pre-School Education Curriculum Draft (2018) which can be the standing documents the State can adopt in preparing State Curriculum framework that can be supported for effective implementation, with a guideline or manual for teachers. It is important that the curriculum indicates the linkage-continuation of Pre-school curriculum with early grades (Class I elementary level).

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that Early Childhood Education which is a pre-school education (PSE) focused program is the foundation of learning process of the child. Hence ECE centres have to be properly monitored because unless pre-primary education is effective, it may be hard to achieve quality learning outcomes at a later stage and therefore it is necessary for quality practices in developmentally appropriate ECE programme to achieve the standards and sustaining the later development of education. Thus, maintaining quality is the responsibility of the Government and stakeholders at large. Developing a sense of ownership of the pre-schools will help in maintaining the quality of the programme. Directives from the government should be provided for ensuring the optimum developmental opportunities for children and to promote professionalism in the field. Present state of pre-schools education in the State demands the concrete step in terms of policy decision regarding various aspect of pre-schools teacher education. Only solidifying the best of early childhood education can actualize dreams of universalizing elementary education.

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