

Issues & Concerns in Pre-Primary Teacher Education Programmes in India

Madhulika S Patel¹, Parul Singh²&Shreya Urvashi³

¹ Professor, Department of Teacher Education, National NCERT, New Delhi

² Senior Consultant, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), NCERT, New Delhi

³ Junior Project Fellow, Department of Teacher Education, National NCERT, New Delhi

Abstract: There is an increasing positive disposition amongst parents to provide quality education to their children in all sections of the society in our country. This is due to the activism of educationalist and NGOs, the proactive steps taken by civic bodies, development agencies, entrepreneurs and the Governments in different States, Union Territories and at Centre as well as the awareness campaigns in different communication media. The culmination of efforts in the form of “Right To Education (RTE)” needs to be viewed in this perspective. These developments have provided impetus to Early Childhood Education (ECE) creating demand for trained workforce, including teachers with appropriate knowledge, values and skill set to achieve and sustain the desired level of growth in this segment of education. Initially, the Early Childhood Education Programmes as well as the teachers’ training programmes for the purpose were started to fulfill the local demands. This phase was followed by expansion of ECE programmes through inclusion of Government schools and also the large-scale participation of private institutions. These developments created significant and visible variations in the ECE or the pre-primary education programmes in terms of their structure and the delivery. Similar variations have been noticed in the preparation of ECE or pre-primary teachers.

Key Words: Issues, Concerns, Early Childhood Education or Pre-primary Education and Teacher Education

Introduction

Pre-primary education covers all forms of organised and sustained centre-based activities in the country: such as pre-schools, kindergartens and day-care centres designed to foster learning, emotional and social development in children from early days. While National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), recognized Diploma in Pre-School Education (DPSE) has been in existence, but a number of other programmes are also offered by many institutions. The Pre-Primary Teacher Training Programmes offered by different institutions have different structure in terms of duration, contents and emphasis. Accordingly, the courses offered by these different institutions have different names of the courses offered by them, e.g. Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Care and Education, Nursery Teacher Education, Pre-Primary Teacher Education, Preschool Education and Phonics Teacher Training. The institutions offering above mentioned courses also vary in relation to their ownership – Private or government; affiliation and examination bodies; regions; the mode of imparting training regular, part-time, distance, online/digital; curriculum and detailing of activities; training duration; and fee structure. The institutions also differ in terms of their recognition status. The current situation of the ECE and related Teachers’ Preparation Programmes provide an impression that while the Preschool Teacher Education is proliferating to meet the demand of teachers for ECE in the country, but there is no standardization of these teacher education programmes in this segment. A significant number of such teachers’ preparation programmes could be running in the country with partial or no regard to statutory compliances of applicable norms, guidelines or the regulation(s), which in turn could influence the quality of teachers as well as delivery of education by such teachers.

In view of our commitment to accrue quality education to all the children in the country, it is most urgently desirable that the situation is comprehensively reviewed to evolve and integrate the corrective measures to standardize the pre-primary teacher education programmes to with a focus on structure, curriculum and quality with proper institutional mechanisms to ensure statutory compliances. The present paper reviews the current status with focus on the issues and concerns in Pre-Primary Teacher Education Programmes in India in terms of the availability, coverage as well as the diversities that prevail in pre-service teacher education in Early Childhood Care and Education segment. Suitable interventions are suggested for introducing desired changes in the structure, organization and implementation of the programme.

Objectives

1. To analyse the history and present trends in Pre-primary teacher education in India.
2. To discuss the issues and concerns in Pre-Primary teacher education in India.
3. To analyze the policies and practices in the preprimary teacher education in India.

Methodology

This paper is a secondary data based paper and analysis has been made on the existing literature, data and practices from different textual sources. Textual analysis is made from the secondary source available in the MHRD reports, NCERT reports and the books and articles published the issues related pre-primary teacher education in India. To interpret the data, thematic analysis was used for the development of concepts and main text analysis and for drawing the conclusion in preprimary teacher education.

Policy Initiatives for Pre-School Education

In India the provision of early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, is one of the six Education For All (EFA) goals which need to be achieved for the betterment of quality and inclusion in pre-primary education in India. Though, there is no numerical target for reaching the target group within a fixed time-frame, government has been urged to expand the accessibility of it to all, improve quality and ensure equity in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services. Like elsewhere, the importance of pre-primary schooling has long been recognized by educational policy and programmes in India and it has also been a constitutional commitment as a part of the directive principle of the constitution to provide the children before their primary schooling (CREATE, 2010).

National Policy on Education and Pre-Primary Education

The National Policy on Education 1986 (Government of India [GoI], 1986) and its Plan of Action, (GoI, 1992) have placed immense importance on pre-school education. However, it has not been considered a fundamental right, nor it is being fully managed by the education departments at national or state level, although it is partially supported by the ongoing flagship educational programme Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) which includes a major component of Early Childhood Care and Education [ECCE] (CREATE, 2010).

While, the Ministry of Human Resource Development in India is responsible for elementary education, the Ministry of Women and Child Development deals with pre-primary education. The Government of India launched the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme in the year 1975. The Department of Women and Child Development has been implementing the scheme which seeks to provide health care facilities, supplementary nutritional support and to improve children's communication and cognitive skills as a preparation for entry into primary school in India. Initially, the programme started as a project in some states latter on it covers many rural and tribal areas along with some urban pockets targeting mainly underprivileged children of India. The SSA envisages providing pre-schooling in convergence with the ICDS programme for the betterment of children in India (CREATE, 2010).

Present Status of Pre-Primary Education in India,

Pre-school education is provided by private schools and government ICDS (Anganwadi) centers are the part of pre-schooling in India. In addition, there are some ECCE centres running under SSA and some preschools are attached to government as well as private schools. The Seventh All India Education Survey (NCERT, 2005) reflects, there are 493,700 pre-primary institutions in India, out of which 456,994 are in rural areas. These schools serve 26.453 million children of which 12.829 million are girls, according to DISE (District Information System for Education) data (2007- 08). The percentage of enrolment in primary schools with pre-primary facilities is low. It was 10% in 2007-08 compared to 7.7% in 2004-05. The highest percentage of pre-primary enrolment in primary schools is in Madhya Pradesh (19.6%) and the low of 5.0% in Bihar (Mehta, 2010). The third round (2005-06) of National Family Health Survey data (IIPS, 2007) shows that around 56% of children in preschool are enrolled in Anganwadis (ICDS Centres) for early childhood care and education. Among them only 31% of children are attending the centres regularly. A large variation is also found in access to early childhood care and education across the states (CREATE, 2010). Mainly, the Department of Women and Child Development has been implementing the scheme which seeks to provide health care facilities, supplementary nutritional support and to improve children's communication and cognitive skills as a preparation for entry into primary schools of India. Primarily, the programme started as a project in some States, but presently it covers many rural and tribal areas along with some urban pockets targeting mainly underprivileged children of different parts of India (CREATE, 2010) (Haque, Nasrin, Yesmin and Biswas, 2013).

Analysis and Discussion

Teachers have a pivotal role in developing an inclusive and appropriate education system. Motivated, qualified and trained

teachers are essential for meaningful education as the needs and requirements of students and the kind of education to be imparted vary according to age. Learning abilities and learning capacities of different students are also different. If children are taught keeping these factors in mind, education will prove to be understandable and meaningful for them.

Early Life and Education

The early years of one's life are most critical. These years determine their surviving and thriving in life, and lay the foundations for learning and a holistic development. Children develop cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills in these years. Moreover, these early experiences are largely determined by family and community care practices, proper nutrition and health care, learning opportunities and the like. Early Childhood Education, thus, becomes significant in the lives not just of the children, but also their families and society. According to UNICEF, *"Early Childhood Education (ECE) programmes can change the development trajectory of children by the time of entering school. Research in the South Asian region, particularly in India, has documented the effects of Early Child Development programmes on the academic and social preparedness of children for formal schooling."*⁴

The quality of an education system is significantly dependent on the quality of its teachers. So, an appropriate action is to empower teachers and teacher educators to face the challenges as and when they emerge and develop capabilities and confidence in shaping them to their advantages. This, also referred to as *teacher development*, is a continuous process along with the evolution of school education. The challenges for it continue to emerge from time to time within different dimensions and diverse features, are difficult to predict at any point of time and equally impossible to propose any permanent solutions for the emerging issues.

Teacher Education in Pre-Primary Education

However, teacher education as a research area has been found comparatively wanting. Very few studies focus on the status of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) for pre-primary level, and their curriculum and teaching learning practices. Most studies on teacher education in the country have been conducted at PhD, MPhil and project level and have remained purely theoretical researches. While some were concerned with the study of characteristics of teachers, student teachers, and the institutions; others looked at the characteristics of teacher educators and training procedures. By and large, this issue remains important, and requires more looking into. This paper is an attempt to reduce the aforementioned gap. It follows the following path. First, we try to analyse the importance and status of pre-primary teacher education or early childhood education teacher education through a societal lens. We look at how parents see it, how educationists and activists see it, and how non-governmental organizations see it. Then, we see the policy evolution of curriculum frameworks and other documents given out by the government- how the role and aim of education and teachers has changed through the years. Then, after a brief insight on a teacher's role and expectations, we look at the situation of pre-primary teacher training institutes in the country.

Early-Childhood Education Need and Development

Across the country, particularly in urban areas, parents have increasingly been seeking institutional knowledge and services for their young children. This can be considered as a result of shifts in family structures, economic needs and urban lifestyles. Accordingly, demands for cognitive, social and interpersonal nutrients are progressively being expressed as a need for the young child's future development. This, however, is accompanied by a growing shift in perception about children being active, rather than passive, learners. Consequently, there is a dramatic rise in the number of pre-schools, preparatory schools, crèches, BalwadiKendras (Government and Non-Government), Day Care Centers and early learning centers, early diagnosis and special education centers. Unfortunately, there is little understanding of the nature of services available in these programmes or the nature of preparation of personnel who work in such programmes.

Government initiatives and Early Childhood Education

In India, according to Census 2011, there are 164.48 million children of 0-6 years of age. Recognizing the need to provide quality pre-primary programmes, a number of constitutional and policy provisions have been made. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2010 guarantees children their right to quality elementary education. RTE

⁴ [1 http://unicef.in/Whatwedo/40/Early-Childhood-Education](http://unicef.in/Whatwedo/40/Early-Childhood-Education)

urges states to provide free pre-school education for children above three years. The 12th Five Year Plan acknowledges the importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and improving school preparedness. However, the RTE Act does not recognize ECE as a compulsory provision. It was after the position paper on ECE in the National Curriculum Framework (2005) and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy (2013), that India laid emphasis on the important role that families and the community play in planning, implementing and monitoring ECCE programs to ensure quality in ECE. The draft on Quality Standards for ECCE (2012) also emphasizes on 'partnership' of ECCE programs with families and community as a basis for quality of education to children in the early stages.

Still, there is a limited understanding of developmentally appropriate practices in ECCE, both in teacher education and parent community in India. The Policy caters to all children under 6 years of age and commits to universal access to quality early childhood education. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) is the nodal department for ECCE. ECCE is one of the components and aims at psycho-social development of children and developing school readiness. However, there are still substantial numbers of children not enrolled in preschools. Learning assessments also show that literacy skills are poor in early primary grades (cite). This points to the urgency of equipping teachers to help children, particularly from first generation families, develop adequate school readiness through a good quality ECE programme.

In spite of the recognition of the importance of ECE of the Government of India, the challenges in its implementation still remain. It also results due to the fact that while education comes under the Ministry of Human Resource Department (MHRD), ECE since 2006 comes under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). Although the subject is transferred from education and is also not included in the RTE, it continues to be a part of the mandate for the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) as per the ACT (1993). NCTE has the functions to accord official recognition, regulate and maintain standards in teacher education across all stages of school education, including preschool education.

Educational Planning and Early Childhood Education

Even so, preparing teachers have been in the essence of our Education Plans since a long time, albeit in different forms. The systematic processes for the preparation of teachers has been repeatedly emphasised in policy documents and various Commissions appointed by the government of India from time to time. The establishment of the teacher education system in India is rooted in the history of modern education system for the masses established in the 19th century in England and Europe to educate children in the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic). Given the nature and requirements of these schools, the early models of the 'monitorial and pupil teacher systems' were considered appropriate for a large mass of teachers that was needed to cater to the increasing population of students. These subsequently gave way to the 'normal' school (then prevalent in Europe) which institutionalized teacher training. Currently, pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes are being conducted in the country through a diverse organisation and institutions following a variety of modes and materials, at the central and state levels, several organizations and institutions, both in public and private sectors.

Teacher Education Reform in India

Reform of teacher education has been one of the key concerns in the reports of major Commissions and Committees on education. The Education Commission (1964-66) discussed at length various issues related to teacher education. It recommended professionalization of teacher education and internship. The National Commission on Teachers (1983-85) recommended five-year integrated courses and internship. The National Policy on Education (NPE) (1986) recommended the overhaul of teacher education to impart it a professional orientation and referred to the same concerns voiced by the earlier Commission and Committees. These are detailed below.

The first University Education Commission (1948) stated that, "People in this country have been slow in recognizing that the teaching is a profession for which intensive preparation is necessary as it is in any other profession." The Kothari Commission (1964-66) explored the question of teachers and their preparation with one of its key recommendations being that teachers need to be prepared systematically. It said that teacher education needs to be "... brought into the mainstream of the academic life of the universities on the one hand and of the school life and educational developments on the other" (Report of the Education Commission (1964-66) Education and National Development, Ministry of Education, GOI, pp 622.) Further, the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 states that "... teacher education is a continuous process, and its pre-service and in-service components are inseparable." (Ministry of Human Resource Development, GOI, National Policy on Education 1986/92, Page 44). The National Curriculum Framework, NCF-2005 sums up the earlier observation with the following, "though the professional preparation of teachers has been recognized to be critical for the

qualitative improvement of education since 1960s, the ground reality remains a matter of great concern... Existing teacher education programmes neither accommodate the emerging ideas in content and pedagogy nor address the issue of linkages between school and society.” (NCERT, New Delhi, NCF-2005, p-107). Highlighting the need to reform the existing system of teacher education, Justice Verma Commission Report (2012) states, “the approach to the education of Indian school teachers has remained unchanged for over half a century in two crucial aspects: the institutionalized *intellectual isolation* of the school teacher and a circumscribed engagement with *pedagogy* as mere a technique.” (JVC Report, 2012, p-12).

Next, we look more specifically at ECCE. The National Policy on Education (MHRD, 1986) established for the first time, the significance of ECCE as a first step in the educational journey of students. It recognized it as a field that requires extensive coverage, increased funding and the development of a perspective that believes in the holistic development of young children. It clearly directed that learning should be joyful and “there shall be no formal teaching of the 3R’s at this stage.” Although progress since that year has been slow in terms of programmes and outreach, each subsequent Five Year Plan has articulated the need to prioritize education and development of children below 6 years of age.

Major Policies and Early-Childhood Education Stand

Two major policy documents in recent years from MHRD, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) and National Curricular Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) both include new guidelines for curricular practices in pre-school and teacher education in ECCE. Both documents have established the need to examine and prepare in detail our society understands of the needs of young children, at the emotional, social and cognitive levels. While the perspective emphasizes on the need to address the physical well-being of young children, it places equal significance on early care and stimulation as critical for the young child’s development, including preparation for the primary years. NCFTE 2009 views “the need to evolve teacher education programmes specifically meant for preparing teachers in early childhood education” as an important change facilitation step for development of the field of ECCE. A revised draft curriculum for the preparation of ECCE teachers has also been prepared and posted on the NCTE website for comments.

A setback for this field occurred when the Right to Education Act, notified in April 2010, excluded this age group from the legislation. In response to the civil society protests that followed this exclusion, Article 45 of the Constitution was amended to direct that “The State shall endeavor to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years.” In conformity with this, Section 11 of the Right to Education Act states “With a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years, the appropriate government may make necessary arrangements for providing free pre-school education for such children”. Although this is an enabling provision, it does not make preschool education a fundamental right of every child. A big side effect of this exclusion can be considered that ECCE may not get funds allocated at the same level as programmes in the education sector, while it is the foundation stage.

Early Childhood Education a Way Further

Further, the implementation of the Commissions and Reports has been haphazard, to put mildly. For instance, although the National Policy (MHRD, 1986) clearly specifies the age range for ECCE as 0-6 years, there is still a fair amount of ambiguity about the age at which children are eligible for preschool education. Documents of government and private institutions often interchangeably refer to the early childhood age as either between 3 and 6 or 4 and 6 years of age. In most states, the eligibility age for entry to primary school in Grade 1 is 5 years. Paradoxically, the ICDS caters officially to children upto 6 years of age. The NCTE initiated programme of teacher education in ECCE refers to the age group of 4-8 years with “the rationale that the methodology of the preschool stage needs to be extended to the lower primary stage, that is, grades I and II of the primary stage”. The fact that NCTE refers to the entry age as 4 years for DPSE implies that NCTE does not yet recognize that recognized senior secondary schools admit children in Nursery Class at 3 years of age. While it may be contended that NCTE does not recommend that children as young as 3 years of age start Nursery education, there also appears to be a lack of convergence in understanding the rationale in government policies that allow Nursery education to begin at 3 years of age.

Development and Growth Relating to Early-childhood Education

Gaps such as these compound existing ambiguities in the field of ECCE in terms of preparation of professionals (teachers, leaders, researchers), society’s understanding of children’s social and emotional development and readiness preparation for formal schooling. Also, there is limited reference to the age group between 0 and 3 years of age, even though several

government initiatives are designed for the health and nutrition of this age group. Discourse about appropriate early stimulation/interaction or the quality of environment, care and nurturance available for young mothers and children between 0 and 3 years of age is conspicuously absent at most levels, except among academics.

This is not to discredit the work that has been done in this regard. The early 21st century has seen a significant shift in public policy and the debate on school education in India after the re-constitution of the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) (2003); a massive fiscal commitment to funding Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) in the form of an educational cess introduced in the 2004 national budget; a sector-wise attempt to redesign a National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 and textbooks by the NCERT; the introduction of the RTE, Act 2009; and the articulation of radical reforms in the education of teachers, including lengthening the duration of pre-service teacher education and providing professional development, on-site support to teacher practitioners through a National Curriculum Framework of Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009)

Pre-primary Education and its Excellence through National Bodies

Teaching-learning process is more inclined towards the *given*, one-way passing of information and students are like recipients of information. NCFTE-2009 tried to address the mismatch of theory and practice in teacher education programmes by incorporating the socio-cultural contexts of education, giving more emphasis on the field experience of student teachers in all courses through practicum, visits to innovative centres of pedagogy and learning, classroom based research, and internship of longer duration. While NCTE is a statutory body to regulate standards in teacher education in all sectors including ECCE, it still does not have adequate powers or resources to enforce these standards in an effective manner. The DPSE course offered by the different universities and institutes are of wide variations questioning their quality. Although the NCTE has come out with a curriculum for proposed 2-year DPSE course, it is yet to be known how many institutions have actually adopted that across the country.

Conclusion

Conclusively, drastic change is required in teacher education in view of the ongoing changes in the social, cultural, economic and political environment so that teachers could come to terms with the changing needs of contemporary Indian society. Society and education stands in a relation of reciprocal cause and effect. The character of a given society determines the character of its educational system and this system in turn, determines the character of the society. In the absence of clarity of vision about the contemporary social environment, teacher education fails to secularize the behavior of the society with social enlightenment.

First is the documenting of the available pre-primary teacher training institutions. Around 90% of pre-service teacher education institutions are in the Non-Government sector, and most of the States of the Eastern and North-Eastern region of the country face an acute shortage of institutional capacity of teacher preparation in relation to the demand (MHRD, 2012). As a corollary, one of the most difficult parts of such research studies unfortunately become the compiling of a list of NCTE recognized institutes. These come under the unorganized sector, and thus no or unreliable data is available. There is no central authority, not even NCTE, that has a complete list of recognized institutions. Even the institutions that are recognized do not always run the program. This brings us to the second concern- which, if of the demand-supply gap in this sector. As there are hardly enough pre-primary and nursery schools in the country to absorb all those graduating with the DPSE program, there becomes very little incentive for students to pursue this course as a suitable career option. Then, most of the PPTTIs are not in collaboration or any kind of understanding with any nursery or preschool, so the students who come into such institutions have no guarantee of a job after completion of their course. As this is a diploma, the students after completing are not graduates, and thus not eligible for such jobs as well. An effort should be made to better the opportunities for further employment of prospective preschool teachers.

Finally, teacher preparation programme in India varies according to the stages of school education for which the teachers are prepared. The needs and requirements of students and education vary at each level and learning abilities and learning capacities of students are also different. The children should be taught according to their level of understanding and learning experiences provided to them should be understandable and meaningful to their level. At each of these levels, teacher preparation should include particular set of core knowledge, skills, attitude and some practical knowledge of classroom management, student assessment, and teaching methods appropriate to the level. Hence, level and stage-specific teacher preparation programmes are essential. Presently, teacher education programmes available are predominantly for the Primary/Elementary, Secondary stages while the same for the Pre-School and Senior Secondary stage are few and far between. Even the linkages between and among these stages is a concern for promotion of

professionals at different levels.

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