

## Teacher Preparation Programmes for ECCE

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Effective preparation of teachers for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is critical to the issue of quality of ECCE, especially since its focus is on a play-based, child-centered methodology which requires specialised skills and knowledge to equip the teacher to address specific contextual needs of every child. The National Policy on Education (1986) viewed ECCE as a crucial input in the context of human resource development and as a feeder and support programme for primary education.

The ECCE has not yet been accorded the status of a fundamental right, nor is it in the ladder of school education system however it has found a place in RTE 2009 which says “With a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years, the appropriate government may make necessary arrangement for providing free pre-

school education for such children” (Section 11, RTE Act, 2009). However, on 27 September 2013 Government of India (Ministry of Women and Child Development) after due consideration and approval passed a resolution and adopted National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy to promote inclusive, equitable and contextualised opportunities for promoting optimal development and active learning capacity of all children below 6 years of age.

“Teacher education at pre-primary level is perhaps the most neglected and least developed sector in India. Courses available for pre-service training for ECCE teachers are widely disparate in terms of content and duration, despite the fact that NCTE has laid down the syllabus, norms and standards for an integrated Diploma programme in ECCE after grade 12, which was under review recently. Teacher preparation programmes vary from state to state and from private to

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public sector. Variations can be seen in terms of nomenclature (Pre- Primary Teacher Training, Nursery Teacher Training and Montessori Teacher Training etc.), duration (3 months to 2 years), eligibility qualifications (Matriculate/ Secondary to Senior Secondary/ graduation), curriculum, and qualifications of teacher educators teaching these courses” (CECED, AUD 2012). For teachers teaching children below six years, schools select teachers as per their requirements and convenience without according any priority to training and appropriate educational qualifications. The notion still prevails that any person who likes children, or who is herself a mother, will be a good staff member in early-childhood programmes. At one extreme, there are university and government recognised courses with fixed curricula and duration and some standards set for trainers and organisations. At the other extreme, there are private institutions (which have multiplied in the era of globalisation), which run their own courses with no standards for curricula or duration, producing individuals who are unable to develop healthy programmes for young children.

However, there is no demand for trained staff as no State government has laid down any norms for staff qualifications or remuneration, nor any guidelines for the recognition of ECCE staff as teachers. In recent times, private schools have begun to employ staff with B.Ed. and D.Ed. degrees as early childhood

educators, but these individuals have not been trained to apply the principles of child development, or to use pedagogy, there is a general lack of input regarding children’s learning and development. The ICDS programme (earlier it was a four-month training programme, and now its duration is less than one month) has one of the most organised staff-training programmes at the national level, the curriculum is based on the principles appropriate for young children, and yet it is often criticised for its failure to create effective human power. The staff in early childhood development programmes are poorly paid, have no social security, no opportunity for climbing the career ladder, and no status as teachers. For teachers/workers of grades 1 and 2 (which are also included as part of ECCE in the diploma course in ECCE) professional qualifications are prescribed but the teacher education curriculum for this sub-stage is not harmonised across programmes, and not addressed distinctly from the rest of the elementary education stage such as in the Diploma in Elementary Education and Bachelors in Elementary Education. Teacher educators in this field are very limited in number and sometime people with no relevant degree teach in the Nursery teacher training institutes. Regular provisions for refresher and induction training for teachers and teacher educators are rare, integrated and inclusive approach in curriculum transaction is totally missing.

### **ISSUES AND CONCERNS RELATED TO TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN ECCE:**

- There should be uniformity to some extent in the structure of teacher education programmes in all the States and UTs, such as duration, nomenclature, content, pedagogy, assessment etc.
- The access and coverage of teacher training institutes needs to be enhanced. There is inequitable distribution of ECCE teacher education institutions across states at present. The physical facilities are also poor.
- Teaching methodology is limited to copying of notes or lectures or rote learning.
- There is no lab school facility available for Internship. ECCE centres attached to primary schools should be made available for internship.
- It is observed that admissions in the teacher training courses are delayed and just after enrolment trainees are attached to schools for internship having no idea what to do in field and how to do? They are left on their own. As a result they do not get clear idea of programme planning, development of teaching-learning material, teaching methods, assessment procedures etc.
- Capacity of ECCE teachers also needs to be strengthened to handle multi-age and multilingual contexts (National ECCE Policy, 2013).
- The role of open and distance education in teacher preparation needs to be clearly conceptualised and regulatory norm and standards need to be developed for offering courses through the distance mode for pre-primary and grade 1 and 2 teachers, which are at present lacking in the NCTE regulations.
- Creating a single cadre of teachers for the pre-primary and primary levels of education, which together form the foundation of all school education, would go a long way in giving this stage its due importance. An integrated approach will also allow the possibility of the pre-school teacher moving along with her group of children through grades 1 and 2, thus providing the much needed continuity and emotional stability to children during this tender age.
- A common cadre of teachers for ECCE and Primary stage with similar nomenclature and pay scales and terms of employment are required to be formed.
- Training of functionaries (both pre-service and in-service) is very essential particularly keeping in mind the specialised nature of early childhood care and education. Organisations offering ECCE programmes should ensure that there are regular refresher courses, workshops, visits to other schools, self-evaluation techniques etc., for teachers and assistant teachers so that they can update their knowledge and enhance their efficiency.

These issues can be addressed through reforms in pre-service and in-service teacher education.

**Pre-Service:** Develop training programmes that will provide opportunities to teachers to teach in any programme that caters to children up to 8 years. Introduce flexibility in training by creating modular programmes, which help teachers to move from a certificate to a diploma to a degree; each of these achievements will make them eligible for specific programmes, like being crèche worker, day-care workers or *anganwadi/balwadi* teachers or school teachers. Emphasise practical ‘hands-on’ training rather than resorting to outdated, formal, and heavily theoretical approaches, particularly in those aimed at grass-roots-level workers.

**In-Service:** Develop innovative and practical in-service courses, distance-education models, etc., spread over a period of time, to meet the needs of the vast numbers of the so-called ‘untrained’, especially in the private sector. Emphasise short and medium-term in-service training programmes. Develop training approaches and courses employing participatory methods to involve the various players, especially teachers.

Certify and recognise ECCE training to promote both self-employment and employment that can deliver quality services. Strengthen inter-sectoral development, sharing, and networking of resource expertise and resource materials in ECCE.

## PLANNING AND DEVELOPING ECCE TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

ECCE is considered as a preparatory stage for the realisation of Universalisation of Elementary Education. In order to provide healthy and enriched childhood to young learners, a teacher specifically sensitised about the perspectives of child development will be required. In order that early childhood education becomes a reality, in terms of its organisation and accessibility, one of the significant inputs in making a success story of it is that of a professionally trained and committed teacher. The professional preparation of teachers for this stage, hitherto unplanned and uncared for, calls for thoughtful planning of training sequences relevant to the developmental needs of early childhood interwoven with commonalities and specificities.

The ECCE teacher education programmes are offered by both government and private institutions. Most of these courses in government sector are Diploma courses, conducted by DIETs and Nursery Teacher Training institutes. Now Universities have also started offering ECCE teacher training programmes such as Jamia Milia Islamia University (B.Ed. Nursery), Ambedkar University (M.A. ECCE), New Delhi; RIE Bhopal constituent unit of NCERT has developed course for pre-primary and primary; Ministry of Women and Child Development has developed National ECCE policy (2013)

and based on policy National ECCE curriculum framework and quality standards have been developed. Considering the curriculum offered by various institutions, the National Policy on ECCE and also our experience of organising in-service teacher education programmes, ECCE teacher education programmes need to be re-looked.

While planning and developing early childhood teacher education, it is important to take objectives of teacher education into consideration. The objectives of teacher education are to prepare teachers for facilitating physical, motor, social, emotional, creative, aesthetic, linguistic and cognitive development of children; to acquaint them with the knowledge of child psychology; to cultivate social sensitivity, affection for children and respect for their uniqueness; to acquaint them with techniques of caring for children and enable them to identify their needs; to provide experiences and organise activities that promote children's self-concept, creativity and inventiveness; to enable them to select, prepare and use different kinds of resource materials; to develop a sense of involvement with and appreciation of local resources (human and material) and their utilisation; to develop an acquaintance with basics of scientific and technological literacy; to develop a repertoire of children's games, songs and literature; to empower student-teachers towards creating learning readiness among young learners.

ECCE teacher education curriculum should be flexible, innovative and use of locally available community resources. The curriculum must provide hands-on-experience and practical exposure to trainees in different ECCE settings. The teacher education programmes must cover the development and learning aspects of children from birth to eight years, i.e., under 3 children, pre-school stage and early primary stage. The course must be planned in such a way that lectures and theoretical aspects are minimised and practical and hands-on-experiences are maximised. It must include project work/assignments through which trainees will be confronted with real grass-root issues.

**(i) Course Content:** Theory, may include Conceptual Understanding about ECCE; Child Development; How Children Learn, ECCE Curriculum-Methods and Material; Planning and Management of ECCE Programmes; Addressing Variability and Aspects of Equity in ECCE; Advocacy and Communication; Linkages between ECCE and Primary Education/Convergence; Action Research and Innovation and Internship.

**(ii) Course Material:** The course material may be in the form of handouts, photocopies of relevant topics, printed books on ECCE. Under each unit, the core material considered essential for reading by trainees be included in the material to be given to them.

**(iii) Activities:** The course needs to include practical activities like

development of early stimulation material for children under 3 years, advocacy material for parents like slogans, posters, brochures etc., preparations for parent-teacher meetings, cultural activities and festivals, development of teaching-learning material like dominoes, picture cards, conversation charts etc., development of stories and games based on cultural context of the child, puppet making, etc. It must include material development activities for various domains of child development like –

- Language development – developing activities like stories, songs, rhymes, riddles, picture reading charts, games etc.
- Mathematics skills/abilities – developing activities and material for developing concept of number, space, volume, weight, time and speed; material for developing skills of thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, memory skills and sequential thinking; material for reading readiness, writing readiness and number readiness etc., preparation of album for developing environmental concepts.
- Creative art and craft – developing album of art and craft work like marble painting, brush painting, thread painting, finger painting, spray painting, leaf painting, vegetable painting etc., developing skills related to paper cutting, collage work, mosaic development, skills in cutting, stitching, pasting,

working with wire, use of waste material, preparation of puppets, masks, dolls making, making of soft and paper toys, developing apparatus for sensory stimulation, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting and vision etc.

- Physical and motor development – developing material for gross and fine motor development, skills in community mobilisation/resource mobilisation for creating facilities for different team games such as swings, balancing in beams, sand pit, etc.
- Health and nutrition related activities, preparation of first-aid box, administration of first-aid and minor accidents, maintenance of health records and plotting of growth chart, skills in planning and preparation of supplementary nutrition for young children, preparation of nutritive drinks and low cost food (using peanuts, soya beans, green vegetables, sprouted grams), preparation of *salads* (using fruits, vegetables, sprouted *dal* and cereals), projects on cultural practices, skills in serving food, skills in increasing nutritive value of foods through fermentation, sprouting, malting, etc., skills for understanding planning a balance diet with reference to child's needs in a specific area/region.
- Observing and recording, preparation of observation schedule, maintaining total record (health record, growth record chart) through observation of

child in various play situations, development of specimen for communication with parents about child's irregular attendance, annual function, development of album of nature study related to environment science, music, dance and drama activities, maintenance of admission and withdrawal register, contents register, specimen voucher, cost register, etc., some case studies could also be undertaken by the trainees.

**(iv) Practical Work:** The course must include intensive training in practical aspects integrated with theory. It must lay strong emphasis on field visits and visits to different institutions like *Anganwadis*, government primary schools with nursery section, private pre-schools, pre-schools run by NGO's, SOS Village, early primary grades of primary schools, etc., to provide first hand experiences.

**(v) Internship:** The course needs to be designed to include internship in various ECCE settings. During the period of internship, the trainees should plan ECCE activities on a daily basis and undertake these activities in the classroom. As trainees also need exposure in aspects of community participation. They should get chance during the internship to organise and observe activities of community participation and organising meeting of parents.

**(vi) Assessment:** It is necessary to assess teacher trainees regularly for their understanding of the subject matter, development of skills necessary

to organise ECCE programme and handle children effectively with an objective to act as agent for growth, learning and development of children during early childhood stage. It is essential that teacher trainees be assessed on continuous basis for their interest, understanding and practical skills in areas covered under theory and internship. They must get opportunity to prepare projects while working with children and community. The evaluation of trainees may be done by giving grades based on their performance in different areas of theory, practical and internship and marks may be assigned in theory and practical (internship) in the ratio of 2:3, respectively. Assignments, project reports including seminar presentation and small action research should be used as tools for helping trainees learn and enrich themselves from ground realities. They also need to be part of assessment.

## CONCLUSION

In order to provide healthy and enriched childhood to young learners, a professionally trained and committed teacher is an essential. The professional preparation of teachers for this stage, requires thoughtful planning of training sequences relevant to the developmental needs of early childhood providing opportunities to teachers to teach in any programme that caters to children up to 8 years. The Course Content should disseminate information about Child Development; How Children Learn;

ECCE Curriculum – Methods and Material; Planning and Management of ECCE Programmes; Addressing Variability and Aspects of Equity in ECCE; Advocacy and Communication; Linkages between ECCE and Primary Education/Convergence; Action research and Innovation including Internship in any ECCE settings. The course must emphasise on activities, hands-on-experience and field observations. It must also include project work/assignments related to various aspects of child development.

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