

## Child Rights: Need for Better Awareness among Student Teachers

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### **Abstract**

*This study attempts to gauge awareness level of prospective teachers who have almost completed two years, teacher preparation course for primary school level. A sample of 510 second year student- teachers was selected using simple random sampling technique. The sample has given specific introduction to child rights concepts as part of formal curriculum during their Teacher Training Course from 16 Teacher Training Institutes, in Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode and Malappuram Revenue Districts in Kerala. Thus, the study reveals the impact of child rights education on prospective teachers. A child rights awareness test consisting of 52 items covering rights of children under UNCRC (United Nations Child Right Convention) and Indian Constitution was developed. Awareness regarding each of the items in Child Rights Awareness Test was found out. Though the average score of child right awareness is relatively high, there are serious lacunae in the awareness among Teacher Training Institute students as revealed by the extent of awareness regarding particular Child Rights areas. The authors call for concerted efforts to promote child rights awareness among future teachers through different means.*

Children are, the future of humanity. Childhood should be happy and loving. However, for many children, the reality of childhood is altogether different. Children around the world every day live with violence, poverty, discrimination and injustice. It seems that as soon as one crisis subsides,

another emerges. Examples of child abuse and exploitation abound in history. Children suffer from hunger and homelessness, high infant mortality, deficient health care and limited opportunities for basic education. They are forced to work in harmful conditions. Children have the

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right to survive, develop, get protection and participate in decisions that influence their lives.

Under both domestic and international law, children's right to get protection from harm, and to have their basic physical and social needs provided is uncontroversial. At the International level, the United Nations is the most important organisation coordinating efforts to end child rights violations, and at the National and state level many agencies are working for this aim.

### **India and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**

On November 20, 1989, the general assembly of the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989). It comprised of the parts divided into fifty four Articles. The convention specifies a number of basic rights that every child should enjoy. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human-rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. It entered into force on 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49.

The **four core principles of the convention** are: a) non-discrimination, b) devotion to the best interests of the child, c) the rights to life, survival and development and d) respect for the views of the child.

India has acceded to this convention on the rights of the child on December 11, 1992. In the instrument

of accession it was declared that "While fully subscribing to the objectives and purposes of the convention, realising that certain of the rights of child, namely those pertaining to the economic, social and cultural rights can only be progressively implemented in the developing countries. The Government of India undertook measures to progressively implement the provisions of Articles 32.."

India kept in sight the interest of the child when the Constitution was adopted in 1950 and amended subsequently. **Legislative measures** for this can be traced back to the following Acts (Gupta, 2004). The Guardian and Wards Act (1890), The Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), Children (Pledging of Labour) Act 1933, The Factories Act(1948), Young person (harmful publications) Act 1956, Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (1956), The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956), Children's Act (1960), Orphanage and other charitable homes (supervision and control) Act 1960, The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986, Juvenile Justice Act 1986, The Infant Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, Prenatal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation, Prevention and Misuse) Act 1994, Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act, 1995.

The Indian children's Act, 1960, provides for sympathetic welfare and remedial, rehabilitating and corrective state action including the education, against neglected or uncontrollable

children and delinquent children. At the same time, it cites punishable offences for those who (a) indulge in cruelty towards children, (b) employ children for begging (c) give prohibited drugs to children (d) exploit children's labour. Section 3 of child labour Act 1986, prohibits employment of children in defined occupations and in organised employment sectors like factories, companies, Government employment etc.

### **Basic Child Rights**

According to the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**, a child has to be given ten basic rights. These Ten Rights are fundamental to the concept of child rights and hence give overall direction for construction of the text. The Ten Rights are as follows-

1. Child shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, friendship, peace, and universal brotherhood and shall not be exposed to racial, religious or other forms of discrimination.
2. The child shall be protected against all forms of negligence, cruelty, exploitation, and traffic and shall not be permitted to be employed before appropriate age.
3. The child shall be in all circumstances, be among the first to receive protection and relief.
4. The child is entitled to free and compulsory elementary education and such an education is in his best interest and for which parents are to be responsible.
5. The child is entitled to grow up in an atmosphere of affection and moral and material security with public authorities taking care of children without families and other support.
6. The physically, mentally or socially handicapped child shall be entitled for special treatment, education and proper care.
7. Right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services including special health care and protection and prenatal care.
8. The child shall be entitled to a name and nationality.
9. The child shall enjoy special protection to be able to develop in every way in conditions of freedom and dignity.
10. All children irrespective of their race, colour, sex or creed of their parents shall be entitled to these Rights.

### **Teachers and Child Right Education**

'Know your right' is the message of the United Nations. There is always a close relationship between legislative measures, implementation and education. Article 26 (2) of Universal Declaration of Human Rights exhorts that 'Education shall be directed for the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for Human Rights and fundamental freedom'. A key systematic issue of education is to position the school as a place for the

realisation and protection of children's rights enshrined in the Constitution (NCERT, 2006). In order to achieve this goal our teachers need to be equipped to carry out the educational process with the enlightened **consciousness** resulting from **action and practice** of children's rights throughout their career. The basis for action and practice of child right education should be the **skills and knowledge** in this domain. Pre-service teacher education needs to ensure the fundamentals of child right concepts and skills for prospective teachers. Awareness of human rights and the commitment to use this awareness as a means to inspire future generation are necessary ingredients of any teacher education programme (NCTE, 2006).

### **Are Future Teachers Aware of Child Rights?**

This study attempts to gauge awareness level of prospective teachers who have almost completed two years teacher preparation course for primary school level. This sample of teachers has undergone some specific introduction to child rights concepts during their Teacher Training Course. The content covered included rights of children under UNCRC and Indian Constitution. From the informal interview with teacher educators, it was revealed that a minimum of five hours were spent by every student- teacher for discussion, brain storming, and school visit to observe child right implementation at school level which was followed by a seminar and

presentation by their supervising teacher. The study among other things will reveal the impact of these steps in creating awareness about child rights education on prospective teachers.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To find out the extent of Child Rights Awareness of the Teacher Training Institute (T.T.I) students from the total sample and the sub samples based on sex, locale, and type of management of the institution.
2. To test whether there exists any significant difference between the mean scores of Child Rights Awareness of:
  - Male and female students of T.T.I.s
  - Rural and urban T.T.I. students
  - Government and Aided T.T.I. students,
  - Aided and Unaided T.T.I. students and
  - Government and unaided T.T.I. students.
3. To find out the extent of lack of awareness regarding each of the item in Child Rights Awareness Test, among T.T.I. students from the total sample

### **Child Rights Awareness Test**

A list provided by UNICEF on child rights has helped the investigator to identify the different dimensions of children's rights to be included in the Child Rights Awareness Test (CRAT). Content validity was ensured for this test by giving weightage to each of the major Child Rights area mentioned in

the list. The 52 multiple choice test items in CRAT covers the following areas of child rights, viz; definition of the child, non discrimination, best interests of child, right to life, survival and development, respect of the views of the child, civil rights and freedoms, name and nationality, preservation of identity, freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion, protection of privacy, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, access to appropriate information, the rights not to be subjected to torture or other cruel or degrading treatment or punishment, family environment and alternative care, parental guidance, parental responsibilities, separation from parents, family reunification, adoption, basic health and welfare, children with special needs, health and health services, social security and child care services and facilities, standard of living, education, leisure and cultural activities, and recreation, children involved with the system of administration of juvenile justice, sentencing of children, children in situations of exploitations, economic exploitation of children including child labour, drug abuse and children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group. Test retest reliability coefficient of the tool is 0.89 (N = 36).

### **Sample**

The sample for the present study is 510 second year students studying in Teacher Training Institutes, in Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode and Malappuram Revenue Districts in

Kerala, selected using simple random sampling technique. Among 16 T.T.I.s from which the sample was drawn, nine T.T.I.s belongs to Government, four T.T.I.s to aided, and three T.T.I.s belongs to unaided sector. Administration of the Child right awareness test in the sample was taken up in December 2006.

### **Findings of the study**

The data collected have been analysed which revealed the following :

1. Out of the total possible score of 52 in the Child Rights Awareness Test, an average student teacher studying in teacher training institutes had obtained 32 scores. In other words, an average T.T.I. student has 58.81 percent awareness regarding the Child Rights.
2. The result of comparison of mean scores of Child Rights Awareness Test in the relevant sub samples of student teachers is as follows :
  - a) There is no significant gender difference in the Child Rights Awareness among T.T.I. students (CR = 0.88;  $p > 0.05$ )
  - b) There is no significant locale (urban- rural) difference in the Child Rights Awareness among T.T.I. students (CR = 0.19;  $p > 0.05$ )
  - c) In Child Right Awareness there is significant difference between :
    - i. Government and Aided T.T.I. students (CR = 3.53;  $p < 0.01$ ),
    - ii. Government and Unaided T.T.I. students (CR = 5.48;  $p < 0.01$ ),

- iii. Aided and Unaided T.T.I. students (CR = 2.17;  $p < 0.05$ ).
3. Awareness about separate aspects of Child Rights was found out by estimating the percentage of students responding correctly to each item in the Child Right Awareness Test. More than 50 percent of T.T.I. students responded wrongly to more than 25 percent of items (14 out of 52) in the Child Rights Awareness Test. In other words, majority of T.T.I. students lack Awareness regarding these areas of Children's Rights.

**Some important children's rights about which majority of T.T.I. students are not aware** are the following (Note: The value in parentheses is the percentage of students who are not aware about the rights) Right to do job is not a right of the child (63%). Parents have the primary responsibility of upbringing the child (59.61%). Child's interests are the primary consideration regarding the matters related to children (56%). Child gets legal protection and care before and after birth (54.32%). Right to do anything and drive vehicles are not rights of children but to seek help is a child's right (51.77%). Adoption is one legal measure to ensure the congenial atmosphere for the destitute children (51%).

**The other child rights about which majority of T.T.I. students are not aware** are the following: Mothers' knowledge regarding the importance and proper way of breast-feeding is a necessity for child's right.

Government has to approve the activities of organisations for the physical and mental development of children. Government as an agency has to help identify the child and parents in case of disputes. In case of separated parents, the court sends the child with the person who will protect the child the most. Rights of child to express his freedom of opinions are subject to age and maturity. Child rights convention demands for the special care of legal protection for children due to the tender and vulnerable age of children.

Even for the area with the highest awareness, nearly one-third (29.95%) of the students have lack of awareness.

**Listed below are child rights which lack awareness and may seriously affect the future teacher's job as a social engineer and promoter of child development.**

(Note: Percentages of trainees who are not aware are given in brackets). Eighteen years is the legal age limit of marriage of Girls (49.61%). None can force Child to be a witness (49.38%). Family is the basic social unit responsible for child's growth and development (49.34%). Children have the Rights to enjoy free time and to engage in entertainment. Nearly 42 percent T.T.I. students are not aware that Indian constitution ensures compulsory education up to the age limit of 14 years. T.T.I. students (49.81%) have lack of awareness that the Right for development, Right to have a name, Right to know Parents, are all Rights of every child. T.T.I. students are

not aware that Cigarette, Beedi workers should have minimum age of 15 years (49.34%). 48.63 percent T.T.I. students are not aware that by registering their birth, the right of the child to get parental protection is guaranteed. Almost 46 percent T.T.I. students are not aware that pregnant women's awareness regarding Nutritional Foods is a very important measure for child rights. Population education, health awareness and environmental protection are all factors essential for children's development (48 %). A life with dignity is applicable to all children irrespective of nationality, status of parents (47 %). Child labour until the age of 14 years is prohibited (47 %). Joyful environment, loving atmosphere and mutual understanding are all essential components for the complete and balanced personality development of child (46 %). Children have right to assemble and form peaceful groups irrespective of Teachers' and Parental wish (45 %). Nation cannot deny the rights for Tribal child to grow along with his social groups to speak his vernacular and develop tribal culture (45 %). One cannot discriminate children based on omissions and commissions of parents, guardians or any other family members (44 %). The rights for education of the child criminal attitude towards alien nations and culture is not a part of right for education (44 %). No Nation can discriminate against a child based on parental religion, nationality or political views (43%).

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

Though the average score of child right Awareness Test is relatively high, there are serious lacunae in the awareness among T.T.I. students in Kerala. The extent of awareness regarding particular child rights areas reveals this, for example even for the area with highest awareness (with regard to right issues the legal age of child is limited to 14 years by Indian constitution) lack of awareness is nearly 30 percent. This calls for concerted efforts to promote child rights awareness among future teachers through different means. Consider the following in this regard.

- Setting the classroom climate demonstrating respect for justice and child dignity in an experience-based and practice - oriented style with the involvement of prospective teachers, parents and community;
- Arranging action based activities than that of task and talk based activities for teaching of child rights including discussion, role playing, and seminar presentation of field experience etc;
- Structuring conflict situation to promote inquiry and provide opportunities to the prospective teachers for critically analysing Child Rights issues;
- Selecting appropriate learning strategies like brainstorming, cooperative learning, suitable questioning related to the social development of the prospective teachers;

- Selecting appropriate learning activities to provide opportunity to the prospective teachers for expressing creative ideas and solutions to the problem related with child right's issues and to explore and develop personal, moral, social, ethical and democratic values regarding Child Rights;
- Arranging inter institutional and inter school level competitions in essay, quiz, role-play etc., and organising exhibitions for the benefits of teacher trainees and local community, incorporating cultural programmes will all help enhance child right awareness among prospective teachers and the public in general.

Further, there is need for Teacher Educators to become the living models of child rights, practising democratic

decisions making process within their classrooms, identifying prejudices and discriminations. Through critical objective thinking, promoting tolerance and other behaviour and attitudes consistent with child rights principles, that emanates from the master teacher, students – teacher can imbibe the child rights concepts, values, attitudes and skills from their own classroom.

The study suggests that due to the better academic quality of students selected in Government Teacher Training Institutes (T.T.I.), The student- teachers have higher child rights awareness. To improve awareness about the child rights among students, the curriculum for teacher education should cater to this need. Today's T.T.I. students are tomorrow's teachers. Creating better awareness of these prospective teachers should catch our immediate attention.

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