

A Study of the Present Scenario of Early Childhood Education in Bhubaneswar

G.N. PRAKASH SRIVASTAVA* and RANJEATA SINGH**

Abstract

The various policies and programmes of education place emphasis on Early Childhood Education (ECE). In this regard, NCERT has also come out with a 'Minimum Specifications for Pre-schools' to ensure that every school is equipped with the necessary requirements to cater to early childhood education. The present study covers ten ECE centres in Bhubaneswar in its study to see if they meet these specifications of NCERT. The finding is hardly encouraging with most of the centres wanting in various aspects of the NCERT norms. There is an urgent need for the quantitative as well as qualitative improvement of these centres.

Introduction

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) has received special attention in the national education policies and programmes especially after the adoption of National Policy for Children (1974). The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme launched in 1975 as a sequel to children's policy is an important milestone in the growth of ECE in the country. It got further impetus with the adoption of the National Policy on Education (1986), which viewed it as a crucial input in the strategy of human resource development, as a feeder and support programme for primary education. Consequently the

National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) states that young children be provided care, opportunities and experiences that lead to their all-round development – physical, mental, social and emotional, and school readiness (NCERT, 2005). National Policy on Education (MHRD, 1986) recommended a holistic approach for the development of the child. It also emphasised that the introduction of 3 R's and formal methods of teaching and learning ought to be discouraged at this stage (prior to 6 years. of age) and the entire ECE programme should be organised around play and child's individuality.

The NCF (2005) observes "the early childhood stage, until the age of 6-8 years

* Head, Department of Education, (NCERT) Regional Institute of Education, Bhopal 462 013.

**Professor (Education), RIE, Bhubaneswar.

and Central Welfare Board took steps to open pre-school centres in the name of *Balwadis* and *Anganwadis*. The number of these institutions are increasing day-by-day. Three Balwadi Training Centres at Bhubaneswar, Baripada and Koraput have also been opened for pre-service and in-service training of teachers. Most of the *Balwadi* and *Anganwadi* centres have been established in rural, tribal and slum areas. At these centres, children get free education and are supplied with play materials and Mid-day Meals.

In urban areas, English medium Pre-school Centres are predominant though they charge high fee, particularly for running such centers as they do not get any financial assistance from the Government or any other agency. Among these Nursery and K.G. schools, convent schools, Steward Schools, D.A.V. Schools, Institutes of Integral Education are quite prominent in Bhubaneswar. Apart from English medium they also impart instruction in Hindi and Oriya. They provide ample facilities for emotional, intellectual and aesthetic development of children through curricular and co-curricular activities. Indian Association of Pre-School Education have opened a Model Oriya Medium Pre-School Centre in Bhubaneswar. Some other organisations like REACH are also working to provide Pre-School Education to Tribal and Rural Children in Oriya medium. It is a good sign that many institutions and persons are now showing interest to open pre-school centres. International organisations are also coming forward to assist for the cause of Pre-school Education in the State.

The Study

Keeping in view the above observations a study was conducted in 2005-06 to find out the present status of ECE in Bhubaneswar entitled "A Study on the Present Status of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Bhubaneswar" which encompasses the physical facilities including out-door and in-door equipments content and methodology, teachers' qualification, language skill development, cognitive skill development, creative and expressive art (music and dance, drama and dramatic plays), physical education including hygiene, health care and nutrition and provisions for social and emotional development at ECE centres.

The present study was an attempt to put forward the prevailing conditions of ECE centres in Bhubaneswar in accordance with 'Minimum Specifications for Pre-schools set by NCERT (1996), list of activities designed to assist the development of child as a whole with reference to the 'Early Childhood Education Curriculum' (NCERT,1996) and to know about the teachers basic knowledge of child development.

The Objectives

1. To study the physical facilities prevailing at ECE centres of Bhubaneswar.
2. To find out the minimum qualification of teachers in these centres.
3. To study the equipments and materials used at these ECE centres.
4. To study the content and methodology adopted by these ECE centres.

done for each item of interview schedule and observation schedule. For the questionnaire a descriptive analysis was done.

Major Findings

- 20% of ECE centres currently running in Bhubaneswar fulfill the NCERT norms, i.e. the catchment area of ECE centres without transport facility is ½ to 1 kms. and with transport facility is 1 to 8 kms.
- As precautionary measures, 90% of ECE centres have school boundary.
- In 40% of ECE centres the classroom area for 30 children is more than 35 sq.mts. The norm set by NCERT is 35 sq.mts. for a class of 30 children. Thus, out of 10 ECE centres only 4 ones fulfilled the norm.
- All ECE centres have toilet, 70 % of centres have veranda and only 10% have food storage and cooking facility in addition to classrooms.
- 80% of ECE centres display children's work on classroom walls at children's level.
- Though 60% of centres provide aquaguard facility but mostly children use their own water bottle.
- All the ECE centres have Indian type toilet with regular water supply and 80% of them provide soap and towel as sanitary facility to children.
- Only 20% of ECE centres have outdoor play area of 300 to 450 sq.mts.
- For outdoor play, 80% of ECE centres provide ball to children whereas other play materials are hardly found as shown in Table 1 given here.

Table 1: Availability of Equipment for Out-door play

<i>Equipments Available</i>	<i>No. of ECE centres</i>
Flying disc	3
Ball	8
Skipping	1
Cycle	2
Rope Ladder	1
Slide	3
Sand pit	2
Water Play	1
Bat	2
Clay	1
Ring Ball	2
See-Saw	1
Swing	1

- As in-door equipments, 50% of ECE centers provided building blocks to children. Other materials available at these centers were as per Table 2 given below.

Table 2: Equipment for In-door play

<i>Equipment Available</i>	<i>No. of ECE centres</i>
Sand	1
Paper	3
Colour	1
Beads	2
Clay	3
Water	1
Building Block	5
Toys	1
Puzzles	3
Card Boards	1
Picture with broken pieces	1
Seriation	1
Matching	1

Content and Methodology

The content and methodology was found child-centred and process-oriented. Activities like rhymes, action and asking questions to individual child were done in all the 10 ECE centres. In 9 institutions activities like singing, dancing and drawing were done; in 8 institutions activities like paper folding was performed; 5 institutions gave emphasis on mini sports; in 4 institutions children were asked to tell and narrate stories; 2 centres provided opportunity for clay modelling; and teachers had free talk with children in 2 institutions. Most of the ECE centres conducted activities organised at these centres.

Table 5: Child-centred and Process-oriented Activities

<i>Activities</i>	<i>No.of Institutions</i>
Paper folding	8
Singing	9
Story-telling by students	4
Dancing	9
Clay Modelling	2
Asking questions	10
Free talk	2
Conducting Debate	1
Drawing	9
Fancy Dress	1
Mini Sports	5
Computer Games	1
Narration	2
Mono-acting	1
Rhyme with Action	10

- 80% of ECE centres, conducted parent-teacher meeting to discuss about the child's progress in the class.

- Though the medium of instruction in all the institutions was English but Hindi, Oriya and Bengali were also used in different institutions.

Table 6: Daily Activities for Physical and Mental Development

<i>Activities</i>	<i>No.of Institutions</i>
Mass P.T.	1
Yoga	2
Puzzle	1
Jumping	1
Drilling	3
Questioning	2
Running	1
Playing	3
Dancing	1
Preparation of Craft-work	1
Simple exercise	2
Problem-solving activity	1
Aerobic	1
Meditation	1
G.K.	1

According to NCERT specification the activities for physical and mental development of children should be as per their age and developmental stage. In the study it was not found so, and activities were performed as per Table 6.

Activities for Parent-teacher Contact

It was found that out 10 ECE Centres 8 institutions conducted parent-teacher meeting; 4 institutions used to have formal talk with parents, in 3 institutions teachers used to maintain student diary, in 2 institutions counselling session was organised for parents and in other 2 institutions parents were contacted through phone

songs and rhymes; in 1 institution students were taught about different ways of greeting their elders and friends; and in 2 institutions simple reading was followed. However, no importance was given to role play activity at any of the ECE centre.

Reading Skill Development

Table 8 shows the strategies used for developing reading skills of kids:

Table 8

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>No. of Institutions</i>
Picture Reading	6
Sorting/Matching/Pairing	1
What is wrong	-
Letter Recognition	8
Developing Association	-

According to ECE curriculum, activities to be done in class for developing reading skill in children such as picture reading, sorting, matching, pairing of objects, finding what is wrong, letter recognition and development of associating abilities by providing various objects.

Development of Writing Skills

Table 9 shows various activities performed at ECE centres to develop eye-hand-coordination in kids.

According to NCERT, ECE curriculum activities like tracing and simple writing were emphasised only in two institutions. The coordination between eye and hand through tracing and simple writing lead to the development of writing skill. Various

Table 9

<i>Activities related to develop eye-hand-coordination</i>	<i>No. of Institutions</i>
Training	2
Writing	2
Colouring/drawing	9
Thumb/Vegetable printing	2
Puzzle solving	1
Finding odd man out	-
Making association	1
Block Building	2
Joining of dots	1
Paper tearing/folding	2
Stringing the beads	2
Catching balls	1

other activities as mentioned in Table 9 related to eye-hand-coordination were adopted in other ECE Centres.

Development of Cognitive Skills

Simple comparison, copying different shapes, pair formation, identifying things, puzzle solving, explanation by teachers, chart/model showing were used at these ECE centres, 30% of ECE centres only gave, importance to explanation by teachers and simple comparison of objects. Teacher's responses were that for promoting cognitive skills. Activities like playing through educational aids, memory games, putting questions through stories, playing the game odd-man-out, puzzles, block building, manipulation of materials, nature-talk and walk and explaining by showing some materials, etc. were used at these centres.

Table 10

<i>Activities</i>	<i>No.of Institutions</i>
Painting	6
Print making	3
Tracing	1
Moulding	3
Craft	3
Group work	2
Building Blocks	2

For the development of creative thinking ability in children ECE curriculum gives importance to any type of activity which involves application of student's brain. The above mentioned practices were going on in 1 to 6 centres whereas rest 4 institutions were not doing anything for this.

Music and Dance

Songs/rhymes, imitating songs, playing on musical instruments, presentation of recorded music and dance were practiced in 7 to 10 institutions. It was useful for the development of coordination between thinking and action. According to ECE specification coordination between thinking and expressing that in action can be well-developed by providing practice in dance and music to children.

Development of Muscle Coordination

In this reference, in 1 school teacher participated in developing children's muscle coordination by encouraging children to play, in 7 schools simple exercises were demonstrated to children, in 1 school annual sports day was conducted, in 4 schools drill practice was used, in 2 schools the teacher herself

played alongwith children, in another 2 schools dance practice was given, whereas in 1 school children were assisted by the teacher in various games. ECE specification (NCERT....) suggested that teachers in ECE centres should try to involve themselves more and more in classroom activities, which may enhance muscle coordination in children.

Other Findings

- Story-telling, Role play, Puppet show, Fancy Dress Competition and drama were used for expression of children's feeling into action. In order to allow students express their feeling without teaching different actions, single symbols were used.
- For imparting new information to children free talk, CDs, story-telling, Play-way-method, Presenting Picture and charts, drawing, tape-recorder Field trip, New Paper Reading and Book Reading by the teacher were used.
- Physical Development Programme was taken-up through Yoga, Laughing, Dancing, Playing rhymes.
- Health, Hygiene, Care and Nutrition Programme was done through toilet training, uniform checking, nail checking, hair checking, shoes checking and training for good manners, developing the habit of using handkerchief/napkins, inviting doctor at the centre for health checkup and developing the habit of brushing the nutritional problems in children and instruction on food habits and advising parents.
- Social and emotional development related activities included training

- MOHITE, P. 1990. Review of Researches in Early Childhood Care and Education : A Trend Report. M.S. University of Baroda. *Fifth Survey of Educational Research*, Vol. II.
- MURTHY, V. 1992. An investigation into the scholastic readiness of pre-school children, University of Bombay. *Fifth Survey of Educational Research*, Vol. II.
- NCERT. 1996. *Minimum specifications for Pre-Schools*. NCERT, New Delhi.
- _____. 1996. *Prarambhik Bal Shiksha Karyakram*. NCERT, New Delhi.
- _____. 1992. *Prarambhik Bal Shiksha : Prashikcharthi Pustika*. NCERT, New Delhi.
- PATTANAIK. A. 1991. Effects of Pre-school Education on Cognitive Development of Primary School Children. Utkal University. *Fifth Survey of Educational Research*, Vol. II.
- ROBINSON, H.F. 1977. *Exploring Teaching in Early Childhood Education*. Allyn and Bacon, Inc., New York.
- SETH, K. and K. AHUJA. 1992. Minimum Specifications for Pre-schools. National Council of Educational Research and Training. *Fifth Survey of Educational Research*, Vol. II.
- SHUKLA, R.P. 2003. *Early Childhood Care and Education*. Sarup and Sons, Ansari Road, Darya Gunj, New Delhi.
- SOOD, N. 1992. Pre-school Education in the ICDS : An appraisal. New Delhi : National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development. *Fifth Survey of Educational Research*, Vol. II.
- SPODEK, B. 1982. *Handbook of Research in Early Childhood Education*. The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York.
- SRIVASTAVA, S. 1992. A short-term longitudinal study of the impact of exposure to the science-oriented educational toys on the concept and language development of the pre-school children. Indian Council for Child Welfare, Madras. *Fifth Survey of Educational Research*. Vol. II.
- YASODHARA, P. 1991. Attitudes of parents and teachers towards various aspects of pre-school education. Psychology. Utkal University of Educational Research, Vol. II.