

Teachers perceived challenges during curriculum implementation in preschools

Shachi Vashisth¹

¹Department of Human Development & Childhood Studies, Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi 110016, India

shachivashisth@gmail.com

Veenu Wadhwa²

²Department of Human Development & Childhood Studies, Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi 110016, India

veenu.wadhwa@ihe.du.ac.in

Reetu Chandra³

³Department of Elementary Education, National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi-110016, India

ncece.ncert@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author : Mrs. Shachi Vashisth

Abstract: Objective

The present study aimed at identifying the challenges preschool teachers encounter in the curriculum implementation. In addition, this study also focussed to find out the underlying reasons of most commonly stated issues of implementation from the teachers' perspectives.

Methodology

An extensive literature search was carried out using Google Scholar, Science Direct, Scopus, SciFinder, Web of Science and PubMed as search platforms. Articles, books, Master's and Ph.D. dissertations and government reports related to challenges or problems faced by teachers during curriculum implementation or teachers preparedness in the implementation of preschool curriculum or determination of difficulties faced while implementing preschool curriculum were extensively studied and relevant information were pooled to frame the article.

Results

The key findings of the study revealed that preschool teachers face an array of problems while implementing curriculum such as teacher's preparedness, inadequate resources, lack of resting time, overcrowded classrooms, and non-involvement of parents to their wards curriculum, lack of in-service trainings and no motivation and support from administration.

Conclusion

The study recommends that problems of preschool teachers should be analyzed periodically and realistic practical solutions should also be offered to increase effectiveness in curriculum implementation and to achieve quality early childhood care and education.

Key Words: : Curriculum; Curriculum implementation; Preschool curriculum; Preschool teachers; Problems of preschool teachers

1. INTRODUCTION :

Education in India is a fundamental right of every Indian (Sanjay, 2014). The Constitution (Eighty-sixth amendment) Act, 2002 included Article 21A in the Constitution of India, which specifies that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine (Sanjay, 2014). Nearly eight years after the Constitution was amended to make education a fundamental right, the Government of India implemented the law to provide free and compulsory education to all children in age group of 6-14 years from 1st April 2010 (Literacy, 2019; Singh & Nagpal, 2010). The law makes it mandatory on part of the state governments and local bodies to ensure that every child gets free education in a school in the vicinity (Singh & Nagpal, 2010). Government of India approved the new National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 on July 29, 2020 with increased focus on the universalisation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in a phase-wise manner (Children of 3-6 years will get free access to high quality ECCE at pre-school or anganwadi or balvatika). The NEP highlights that by 2030 the universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care and education must be achieved (Pathak, 2021).

Education is commonly divided formally into four stages such as foundational, preparatory, middle, secondary (5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18 years) and then college or university (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

In the new 5+3+3+4 structure of education, initial 5 years of foundation comprises of 3 years (3-6 years) for pre-school or anganwadi or balvatika and remaining 2 years (6-8 years) for class 1-2. Foundational education forms the very basics of learning and aim at promoting better overall learning, development, and well-being. It plays a very crucial role in the later life of that child and during which physical, psychomotor, social-emotional, cognitive and language development are mostly (over 85%) finished. After finishing foundational education, child enters class III and the preparatory or primary education starts. It covers three years (8-11 years) of schooling class III to V. Class VI to VIII is considered as middle while class IX to XII is considered as secondary (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

Among different stages of education, pre-school or pre-primary education is the most important because it aims at the holistic development of a child including his/her social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. Deficits during foundational stages have significant and cumulative adverse impact on child's development (Kim & Umayahara, 2010). The paramount importance of the early years is widely documented in various international documents and developmental goals such as UN Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC 1989), Education for All (EFA, 1990) goals and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Nastasi & Naser, 2020). Considering the importance of early years of education, Government of India commenced the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy in 2013 (Women & Child Development, 2013). ECCE policy reaffirms the commitment of Indian Government to provide integrated services for holistic development of all Indian children from the pre-natal period to six years of age (Women & Child Development, 2013). This informs the reason why the periods of the early years need to be handled with all special and detailed attention.

ECCE objectives and action plans are delivered through public, private and non-government organizations i.e. trust, societies, religious organizations and internationally funded agencies. The public service provider is the largest ECCE service provider in India through Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) which holds record of World's largest programme to provide ECCE (Women & Child Development, 2013). At present, ICDS programme extends its services to more than 245 lakh children under 6 years of age through a pan India network of 13.84 lakh authorized Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) as on 31.12.2020 (Ministry of Woman and Child Development, 2021). Programmes such as *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) and National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) have also helped setting up of ECCE centres in various districts in India. AWCs are an integral part of this program as they are the centres entitled with carrying out the implementation of the program (Kapil, 2002).

Though, ECCE policy was successful in identifying the problem at large, its output has not been entirely a success. The implementation of the program has not been up to the mark and highlights a lot of holes that need to be fulfilled. One factor that is most important to consider when identifying the lacunae is quality of a curriculum and its effective implementation (Reetu et al., 2017). A quality curriculum, however, standing alone is not adequate for providing high quality of pre-school education rather there is a need for good implementers of those quality curriculums. In that sense, teachers play the lead roles by transferring all those theoretical information into real classroom settings. In addition, teachers also have significant contribution in child guidance and discipline, establishing reciprocal relationship with families, respecting cultural and ethnic diversity and creating a caring community of learners (Erden, 2010). Therefore, there is the need for teachers to fulfil all those roles especially, when their role is related to curriculum implementation. It appears that despite what is planned and documented in the pre-school curriculum, practices of teachers and events going on in the classroom settings are not being realized. In this sense, as a researcher identifying the challenges pre-school teachers' face during the implementation of the curriculum is a necessity because once the challenges were detected precisely, it is easier to deal with those challenges by finding ways of managing those challenges.

The objective the study is to explore the challenges that Indian pre-school teachers face in the implementation of the early childhood curriculum and identifying the factors that affect the implementation of the early childhood curriculum. The study also aimed to provide data for policy makers and educational leaders in discovering by analyzing early childhood teachers challenges they face in the classroom.

2. MATERIALS & METHODS

An extensive literature search was carried out on all relevant search engines for the keywords such as challenges or problems faced by teachers during curriculum implementation or teachers preparedness in the implementation of preschool curriculum or determination of difficulties faced while implementing preschool curriculum. Review articles, research papers, and reports were downloaded from output of the search platforms. Research and review articles, books, Master's and Ph.D. dissertations, government reports and blogs have been extensively studied and relevant information have been pooled to frame the present article.

3. DISCUSSION & FINDINGS :

Primitive years have many knowledge bases which are rooted in child development, social work, family relationships, anthropology, as well as health, developmentally appropriate practice and special education. So teachers need to be skilled at many issues which in turn build a huge responsibility in the shoulders of early childhood educators (Kendall, 1993). McDonnell describes the early childhood teachers' role as having the knowledge of following twelve areas; (1) foundations, (2) child development and growth, (3) curriculum, (4) health, safety and nutrition, (5) child observation, record keeping and assessment, (6) creating environments for young children, (7) child guidance and disciplines, (8) cultural diversity, (9) special needs, (10) family and community relationships (11) professionalism and professional development (12) administration and supervision (McDonnell, 1999). The roles of the early childhood teachers can be expanded more however there is a common point in all explanations: the teacher's role in curriculum.

Considering the teacher's role in curriculum, there are various factors affecting it. Both the personal and environmental factors are affecting the curriculum implementation in the real classroom settings. To begin with, characteristic of the teacher might be among the factors. As the teachers are social beings and as they are coming from different backgrounds, they bring their past experience into their classroom practice. Accordingly, the personal characteristics have an impact on the implementation of the curriculum. To illustrate, teachers characterized as motivated, responsible, organized and open to new learning opportunities were found high curriculum implementers compared to teachers described as unmotivated, not open to changes (Lieber et al., 2009).

In pre-primary education, adequate infrastructure is crucial to provide high quality education because infrastructure, within a complex system, serves as a foundation for the rest. The lack of necessary infrastructure causes problems for proper curriculum implementation as it has a role in establishing and enforcing program and child outcome standards. Accordingly, a school without a proper infrastructure opens the doors to other implementation problems (Dhingra & Sharma, 2011; Dixit et al., 2010). It was also noticed that the problems of preschool teachers experienced during curriculum implementation showed a significant difference with type of schools they are working on. There is a difference between private preschool and public preschool. This consequence may be explained by the difference in the level of infrastructure in those types of schools. Preschool teachers stated that there was an inadequacy of resources for doing different kinds of innovative activities. They mentioned that materials exist in the schools were just for repeating the same kind of activities rather than doing something original (Erden, 2010; Ghosh & Dey, 2020; Singh & Mukherjee, 2017).

Pre-school teachers, regarding the problems created by the lack of resting time, elaborated that they need small and frequent break times/resting times in the same way as the primary school teachers or college teachers have. Lack of resting time caused psychological problems for pre-school teachers. They stressed that this situation makes them overloaded very much. Both physically and psychologically they get tired of being in the same environment for long hours, which affects the quality of the teaching for their opinion (Erden, 2010; Sansthan, 2013). Pre-school teachers explained that the purpose from getting relaxed should not be considered as to sit and doing nothing rather it should let teachers to get out of the classroom and change the atmosphere for frequent breaks. These break times of preschool teachers must have stated legally in the related regulation. Preschool teachers also emphasized that crowded classrooms cause a decrease in the overall quality of the education carried out in classroom settings. For teachers, first of all, this eliminates the one-to-one interaction with children (Rao, 2010). Teachers had to deal with the overall performance of the children rather than finding a chance to interact with each child individually. Also, the more children preschool teachers have in the classroom, the more they get tired physically and this affects their classroom performance accordingly (Rao, 2010). In addition, small size classrooms also limit the various physical activities and thus, affect proper curriculum implementation. Pre-school teachers elaborated that once the classrooms are small and not suitable for the activities with movements, the activities have to be limited with table activities only. Furthermore, more teacher-directed and guided activities were chosen to be carried out within the classroom environment. Another consequence of being in small classroom environment is the increase in aggressive behaviour among children. The preschool teachers emphasized that when there is less personal space left to each child, they can not move freely as to express themselves. For teachers, it is unrealistic to expect 5-6 year-olds to sit on their chairs for long hours. Children are full of energy and have to move to release their energy however small classroom environment prevents their free movements so this results in aggression among the children in the classroom. In sum, being in a small classroom environment caused the decrease about the kinds of activities and the increase aggressive behaviour among children (Kaul et al., 2014). As a solution to those issues, pre-school teachers involved in outdoor activities more when the weather is warm and suitable. However, when this is not available, the teachers added that they are creating more space within the classroom by carrying tables and chairs to one side of the classroom. Despite, it is difficult and tiring to re-shape the classroom environment in each time when there is a need for activities with movements, it is vital to provide harmony among children. As for the pre-school teachers, it is worth for children's healthy development otherwise this may create more problems in the future.

So, for teachers, there is an urgent need to build large classroom environment as well as decreasing the number of children in existing small classroom environment.

Moreover, the level of support from administrators and colleagues can be explained as one of the important factors effecting early childhood teachers' curriculum implementation. A study by Chandra et al., insisted on the support from the school principal as a key factor for successful curriculum implementation (Reetu et al., 2017). In other words, collaborative environment is a necessity. In the study, it was observed that collaborative relationship and networking were detected as positive factors increasing the teachers' attitudes and motivation, as well as their teaching. Various international studies also supported the necessity of administrative support for a successful curriculum implementation by discussing the fact that teachers need more than just knowledge and skills, they need encouragement and assistance to reach the goals defined for their children (Desimone et al., 2004; Teberg, 1999). The preschool teacher, also, complained about the attitude of school administration towards science/math activities and for them, there is a lack of support for doing it. Teacher added that administration emphasis on art and creating visual objects more because they want to show concrete things to the parents. Similarly, preschool teachers stated that planning outdoor activities like field trips is a tedious task as they faced difficulties in taking necessary permission when a field trip is intended to be done (Ghosh & Dey, 2020). Long process of permission taking is the de-motivating factor for organizing field trips. Teachers added to have less hierarchical process for obtaining the necessary permissions. Moreover, as another obstacle in front of the field trips is the attitude of parents towards field trips. The preschool teachers clarified that parents are not willing to give their consent for the field trips as the children are still young. They explained that parents do not want their child to be involved in field trips for safety and health issues (Ramya, 2014).

Training plays an important role on the delivery of quality of teaching and learning through curriculum implementation in their respective schools (Golden-Jubilee, 2013). In-service trainings that school administrators organised is not enough to abreast pre-school teachers with the current trend of the early childhood curriculum. It was observed that the type of in-service training pre-school teachers receive is not from the field of early childhood education. Thus the in-service training that teachers participated might not be supportive for them in finding answers for their questions on curriculum implementation.

It was also noticed that the preschool teachers' had problem in implementing the early childhood curriculum due to parents' attitude towards early childhood education. They claimed that parents see the early childhood education centres as a playing area rather than a learning environment. For parents, children do not learn academic skills such as science and math in early childhood education so this leads parents to underestimate the significance of early childhood education and to see parent involvement as an unnecessary activity (Dhiman, 2015).

In addition to the factors affecting the curriculum implementation, early childhood teachers are facing with the problems when there is a curriculum reform. Teachers complained that they had to fulfill too many tasks related to the implementation of the curriculum however they do not have adequate time to finish those and they became overburdened by the heavy workload (Dixit; Smitha, 2020). Another problem was the frequent supervision and intervention by the principal into the classrooms so teachers felt that the principals do not trust and these lead teachers to lose confidence in their teaching. Lack of getting answers from principals regarding the new curriculum reform is also one of the problem teacher faced during curriculum reform. Teachers added that despite the expectation was high from the teachers; it was surprising to see that the administrators itself do not know much about the things about to implement. Teachers were also having the problem of lack of support and encouragement from the administrators and parents. There is a need for collaboration among the teachers, principals and parents for the proper implementation of the new curriculum (Reetu et al., 2017).

4. SUGGESTIONS TO OVERCOME COMMON CHALLENGES PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS:

This article has presented an insight into the phenomenon of teachers' encountered challenges during curriculum implementation in preschools. The authors based on the findings of the study suggested following recommendations-

- The curriculum requirements for each age group, from 3 to 6 years and 6 to 8 years, need to be identified so as to make curriculum more meaningful as per the developmental needs and characteristics of learners at different stages of development.
- The study also highlights the need to ensure exclusive teachers for ECCE, having good understanding about the curriculum, competency and attitude. The teachers can plan the curriculum activities as per the priorities and needs of the learners.
- Government authorities should organise frequent comprehensive in-service training programmes for both teachers and parents with respect to current ECCE curriculum to abreast teachers as well as parents with respect to importance of ECCE curriculum and its impact on their wards' education.

- Rather than solely monitoring of teachers, a system of regular hand-holding support and mentoring will be more effective in addressing challenges encountered during curriculum implementation.
- Considering the state to state variations, opportunities need to be given to the preschool teachers to visit other states preschools in order to facilitate sharing knowledge and learning on different aspects of curriculum implementation.
- Inputs from the practicing teachers should be taken into consideration periodically when a new curriculum is designed or updated as they are real ones who deal with the learners.

5. CONCLUSION:

In order to achieve the high quality standards in early childhood education, problems of preschool teachers should continue to be analyzed well and realistic practical solutions should also be offered to increase effectiveness in curriculum implementation.

Author contributions

Conceptualizations, methodology and analysis by VS and CR; Writing-original draft preparation by VS; Writing-review and editing by CR and WV; Project administration by WV

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Declaration of interests

All authors state that no competing conflicts of interest exist regarding authorship and publication of article.

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