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## Pre-service education of teachers and their knowledge on preschool education

**Konthoujam Pushparani Devi, Tulika Borah, Binapani Deka and L Manizia**

### Abstract

A quality teaching model includes responsive and reflective teachers. The teachers are the core of teaching – learning process. This study seeks to discover the level of teaching knowledge of preschool teachers. A total of 100 preschool teachers were selected from the state of Manipur. To achieve the research objective, a structured standardized questionnaire was used to assess the knowledge of preschool teachers regarding preschool education. The study found that majority of the respondents had average level of knowledge of preschool education. Statistical analysis (*t*-test) revealed a significant difference in the scores of knowledge on preschool education of teachers having pre-service training in Early Childhood Education and those without training in Early Childhood Education.

**Keywords:** Preschool education, pre-service education, early childhood education

### 1. Introduction

Preschool education is considered to be of fundamental importance for children belonging to the age group of 3-6 years as it prepares for future schooling. It is also referred to as nursery school, pre-primary school, play school or kindergarten etc. Preschool provides a strong base for lifelong learning and learning abilities, including cognitive and socio-psychological development. It builds the foundation of a child for future development. The phase from conception through birth to 8 years of age is crucial for cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of children.

Children's well-being has been addressed in some form or the other in India's developmental plans, ever since it became republic in 1951. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) were initially treated as a welfare scheme under the ministry of Family and Child welfare. A landmark change occurred in the approach of ECCE in third five-year plan, wherein a shift in approach from child welfare to child development emerged. This shift led to the declaration of National Policy for children, 1974. A major break though emerged in the concept of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) with the announcement of the National Policy on Education in 1986. The main aspects of the policy were recognition of the holistic development of the child, emphasis on play as a medium of informal teaching, the use of non-formal methods, and a pluralistic and continuous approach (Murlidharn and Kaul, 1993). The consecutive five-year plans have acknowledged the importance of ECCE, through several schemes like, creches and day care centres, Balwadis, Anganwadies, privately run fee-paying nursery and play schools. Recently, structural changes have been brought by the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, through universalization of Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE), indicating the need of appropriate care and stimulation in the early years of children.

The National Education Policy 2020 is the education policy of the 21st century aims to address in the aspects of educational structure, including its regulation and governance. It aims to create a new system that is aligned with the goals of 21<sup>st</sup> century education, including Sustainable Development Goals. The National Education Policy lays particular emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual. It is based on the principle that education must not develop only the 'foundational capacities' of literacy and numeracy and 'higher-order' cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving, but also social, emotional, moral and physical abilities.

Article 45 of the constitution of India seeks to provide provision for Early Childhood Care and Education to children below the age group of six years. It states that the State shall endeavors

to provide Early Childhood Care and Education for all children until they complete the age of six years. Concurrently, with changes in constitutional provisions and national educational policy, the awareness, knowledge and practices of the personals involved in taking care of children during this period are also equally important. Parents and teachers have an immense responsibility in creating and facilitating development of young children. The role of preschool teacher is not just limited to teaching lessons, but to monitor and facilitate all round development of children. Quality and knowledge of preschool teachers can make an exponential difference in a child's development. Successful preschool experience of a child is very much reliant on excellence of the teachers.

Early childhood is considered to be the most important period of development. Healthy early child development, which includes physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive development, strongly influences physical and mental health of a child and also in development of other skills. The knowledge or skill acquired by children during early childhood period shapes the brain and mental or physical abilities to learn, to get along with others, and to respond to daily stresses and challenges. If an early childhood curriculum pays attention to the development of positive dispositions toward learning, a compact emotional foundation for all future skills and knowledge-based learning will be established. Social competence and emotional well-being are central to children's educational achievements. A child who feels emotionally insecure, afraid or anxious will struggle to reach their optimal stage of learning and development. Children develop social capability through stable, caring and responsive relationships with adult and these relationships form the foundation for learning and development.

Preschool teachers help in developing potential to acquire skill. They focus on each and every child individually. No two kids are alike so it's important for preschool teacher to observe and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each child separately. Regular interaction between parents and preschool teachers is very important. Both sides can discuss the growth and development process of the child. It is one of

the major responsibilities of a preschool teacher to make the parents aware of progress made by the child. Most of the preschools have play based curriculum designed keeping in view the age of the children. For a child, successful preschool experience is very much dependent on quality of the teachers. If they have been treated and taught well, they will always be inclined to go back to schools. It is the role and responsibility of a preschool teacher to impart something gradually a sense of comfort and lifelong love of learning in the child. Though, qualifications for preschool teachers vary according to country and states, but the most important qualification is the ability to make learning joyful.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in West Imphal District of Manipur. A standardized test tool (Baruah & Baruah, 2001)<sup>[11]</sup> was used to assess the knowledge of preschool teachers regarding preschool education and a questionnaire was prepared to assess the educational background of respondents. A total of 100 samples were selected randomly, 50 respondents with pre-service training in ECE and another 50 respondents with no training in ECE.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Knowledge of preschool teachers regarding preschool education

The outcome of the education system is to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, values and ethics. A preschool teacher must have satisfactory knowledge in preschool education. The knowledge regarding the preschool education is much necessary for pre- service professional, because this is the stage where the foundation of a human being is being made. Research studies have established considerable relations between preschool teacher education and preschool teachers' knowledge and skills or long-term outcomes such as children's development (Burchinal *et al.*, 2002)<sup>[12]</sup>.

**Table 1:** Levels of knowledge of preschool teachers on preschool education

Knowledge of preschool teachers regarding preschool education	Number of respondent (n=100)							
	Respondents with pre-service training in ECE (n=50)				Respondents with no training in ECE (n=50)			
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	S.D.	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	S.D.
High	11	22	0.7984	0.0630	9	18	0.69	0.0618
Medium	32	64			30	60		
Low	7	14			11	22		

It is evident from the Table 1 that majority of respondents had medium level of knowledge on preschool education. It was also found that the frequency of respondents with high level of knowledge on preschool education was more in case of respondents having pre-service training in ECE (22%) as compared to the respondents with no training in ECE (18%). The reason that majority of the respondents have average and only few have high level of knowledge regarding pre-school education may be because people in the study area (Manipur), in general are not well aware about the importance of pre-schools and how pre-school education can be beneficial for the children. There is hardly any training available or seminars conducted for pre-school teachers. Most of the teaching methods in pre-schools are still highly conventional,

further, most private school's criteria for pre-school teacher's selection doesn't mandate candidates with degree or diploma in education except for primary and secondary class teachers. All this taken into consideration, a lack of focus regarding pre-school education was observed. Therefore, resulting in pre-school teachers having knowledge regarding pre-school education that's bare-minimum. The training for ECE teachers requires a perspective that is different from that of teachers for elementary and secondary level of schooling. In order to create an effective learning environment for pre-schoolers, teachers must understand the importance of quality Early Childhood Care and Education during early years of life. An important focus of the efforts to raise quality of ECE has been to improve teacher preparation and qualifications.

### 3.2 Association between pre-service education of teachers and knowledge on preschool education

A study conducted by Lingam (2004) [6] stated that, a number of factors influence the professional preparation of future

teachers which needs to be considered with a view to guarantee that teachers are able to meet the demands of their profession.

**Table 2:** Differences in the knowledge on preschool education of respondents with pre-service training in ECE and those with no training in ECE

Knowledge score obtained by respondents with pre-service training in ECE (n=50)		Knowledge score obtained by respondents with no training in ECE (n=50)		t value	df	Sig. value
Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
0.7872	0.064	0.69	0.079	6.734	98	.000**

\*\*p ≤ 0.01 level of significance

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the knowledge on preschool education of respondents having pre-service training in ECE and those with no training in ECE. Findings of Table 2 indicated that there is a significant difference in the scores of knowledge on preschool education of respondents with pre-service training in ECE (M = 0.7872, SD= 0.064) and respondents with no training in ECE (M=0.69, SD=0.079); *t* = 6.734, (df) = 98, *p* = .000(*p* ≤ 0.01). The results suggested that there is a significant difference in knowledge on preschool education of teachers' with pre-service training in ECE with those with no training in ECE. This can be supported by a study conducted by Jan & Khan (2018) indicating that there was a significant difference between Pre-service and In-service B.Ed. trained teachers on commitment to the society and on commitment to the profession dimensions of professional commitment. Suggesting that Pre-service B.Ed. trained teachers are more committed to the society and more committed to the profession than In-service B.Ed. trained teachers. Another study carried out by Tok (2011) [11] suggested that there was a significant difference in pre-service teachers' attitudes towards the profession between their freshman and senior years. It was also found through interview data that both positive and negative changes occur in pre-service teachers' attitudes towards teaching throughout their education, and these changes were observed to be related to teaching practice, cooperating teachers, teacher education institutions and teacher educators. In ECE, the teacher's role is to prepare children to adapt and to face the challenges they may encounter in near future. The

teacher is considered as a vital force in making learning successful for a child. They should possess the knowledge of curriculum development and its appropriate use in different settings for different groups of children (Jacobs, 2001) [3], not only for present needs but also for a rapidly changing future (Mowbray *et al.*, 2003) [8]. The knowledge gained through specialized training should therefore equip them with the ability to decide how the curriculum can be used to engage children to achieve important outcomes. This knowledge further would also assist teachers to tailor teaching strategies according to the needs and characteristics of the individual child or group of children.

### 3.3 Knowledge of respondents on preschool education with respect to their educational qualification and service experience

It is evident from the Table 1 that majority of respondents had medium level of knowledge irrespective of their educational qualification and service experience in Early Childhood Education (ECE). The study also found that respondents with graduate and post-graduate education qualifications, knowledge of respondents with training in ECE had better knowledge on pre-school education than respondents with no training in ECE. Similarly, respondents having 1-3 years of service experience, the knowledge of those without training in ECE is better than those with pre-service training in ECE. But in case of respondents having 4-6 years of service training, those with pre-service training in ECE had better knowledge in pre-school education than those without training in ECE.

**Table 3:** Knowledge of respondents on preschool education with respect to their educational qualification and service experience

Educational Qualification	Levels of knowledge on ECE	Respondents with pre-service training in ECE (n=50)		Respondents with teachers with no training in ECE (n=50)	
		f	%	f	%
Graduate	High	4	8	4	8
	Medium	18	36	20	40
	Low	4	8	6	12
Post-graduate	High	7	14	5	10
	Medium	14	28	10	20
	Low	3	6	5	10
<b>Service experience</b>					
(1-3) years	High	8	16	9	18
	Medium	15	30	22	44
	Low	6	12	10	20
(4-6) years	High	3	6	0	0
	Medium	17	34	8	16
	Low	1	2	1	2

Pre-service training in ECE can develop new ideas providing more knowledge that extend further from what they already learnt. This was supported by another study conducted by

Kutluca (2021) [5] stating that teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about science teaching and that their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) inclined to change according to

professional experience. It was determined that experienced teachers had more teacher-centred bearings than less experienced teachers with more student-centred orientations. Moreover, it was observed that professional experience increased the relationship between the pedagogical content knowledge mechanisms.

Similarly, in the overall result of the knowledge level of respondents, teachers with 4-6 years of service experience in ECE were found to have better knowledge than those with 1-3 years of experience in ECE. Majority of the respondents with 4 to 6 years of service experience had medium level of knowledge. And there are few respondents who had 1 to 3 years of service experience and yet have high levels of knowledge; it may be because most of the respondents have pre-service training in ECE. Teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career. This can be supported by Schachter *et al.*, (2016) <sup>[10]</sup> study, implying how multiple types of knowledge and beliefs, along with holding an early childhood-related degree and teaching experience; the associations of knowledge, beliefs, education, and teaching experience with instruction were found. Another study carried out by Masnan *et al.*, (2019) <sup>[7]</sup> suggested that the knowledge of the teachers was found to increase through their experience and adopted various methods of teaching to help the children understand the learning. Further a study conducted by Buyong *et al.* (2020) <sup>[2]</sup> stated that longer teaching experience contribute to higher pedagogical knowledge. Overall, preschool teachers are aware that the methods of teaching play an important role in the teaching and learning process.

#### 4. Conclusion

The overall results of the knowledge level in Pre-school education, respondents with pre-service training in ECE were found to have better knowledge than that of the respondents with no training in ECE. The frequency of respondents with high level of knowledge on preschool education was more in case of respondents having pre-service training in ECE as compared to respondents with no training in ECE. Further, regarding the differences in the knowledge on preschool education of teachers having pre-service training in ECE and teachers with no training in ECE, it was found that there was a significant difference in the scores of knowledge on preschool education of preschool teachers having pre-service training in ECE and preschool teachers with no training in ECE.

In ECE, the teacher's role is to prepare children to adapt and to face the challenges they may encounter in near future. The teacher is considered as a vital force in making learning successful for a child. They should possess the knowledge of curriculum development and its appropriate use in different settings for different groups of children (Jacobs, 2001) <sup>[3]</sup>, not only for present needs but also for a rapidly changing future (Mowbray *et al.*, 2003) <sup>[8]</sup>. The knowledge gained through specialized training should therefore equip them with the ability to decide how the curriculum can be used to engage children to achieve important outcomes. This knowledge further would also assist teachers to tailor teaching strategies according to the needs and characteristics of the individual child or group of children.

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