

Reach-out of ECCE Diploma Programme

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Background

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is an integral part of school education, which has strong bearing specially upon primary education. It is also an important component for achieving universal enrolment and retention in primary schools. Therefore, proper linkage must be ensured between pre-primary and primary schools. It can only be done by providing necessary maturational and experiential readiness to the children at pre-primary level for meeting the demands of primary education curriculum. This readiness depends on child's early care and education, which includes health care, nutritional support and psychosocial stimulation. Ensuring availability of qualified and trained teachers in ECCE/ pre-primary centres would be an essential condition for achieving.

Hence, it is important to give priority to capacity building of teachers and teacher trainers, building of resources in terms of training materials both in

print and non-print form, provision for field experiences, funding and institutional support.

In order to meet all these demands, the Department of Elementary Education (DEE), NCERT, New Delhi had been organising a six-month diploma course in ECCE since 2006, that enabled teacher trainers to organise State/ UTs/ Institutional level ECCE training programmes, which subsequently enhanced requisite skills in developing resource material for ECCE functionaries, as well as learning and play material for children. It also aimed at strengthening National level resource group for ECCE and building capacities of the States/UTs in this area. Training of personnel from Regional Institutes of Education (RIEs), State Institute of Education (SIEs), State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSAs), District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), Middle-Level Training Centres (MLTCs), Anganwadi Training Centres (AWTCs)

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under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) had been the focus of this training (ECCE diploma course) with following objectives:

1. Increasing knowledge-base of teacher-trainers (trainees) regarding growth development and learning process of young children from birth to eight years of age.
2. Inculcating sensitivity towards needs of young children and issues related to ECCE.
3. Developing competence in conducting ECCE training programmes activities for young children in various settings.
4. Creating awareness among teacher-trainers regarding various teaching-learning strategies to be used in training of teachers.
5. Conducting research studies at State/UT/District level in ECCE.

The course was designed with a focus on training with hands-on-experience and practical exposure in different ECCE settings. This course was organized in three phases every year:

Phase I (Thirteen weeks), this is a face-to-face training conducted at NCERT.

Phase II (Ten weeks), all the participants carried out a project work in their respective places of work and submitted project report as an outcome of second phase of training. These project reports were prepared based on needs, problems

and issues of ECCE viewed by the trainees in the context of their respective regions.

Phase III (Two weeks), this phase was considered as a contact session. It was interactive in nature and included presentations of project reports and viva-voce examination, based on reports prepared by the trainees.

Trainees of all the diploma courses in ECCE conducted since 2006 till 2012 had successfully completed the course. It was expected that after this training, services and skills of those diploma holders would be utilized effectively by the Institutions who nominated them for the training, for conducting various kinds of ECCE programmes in their respective State/UTs covering personnel of public, private and voluntary sectors. It was felt that there is need to analyze involvement and contributions of diploma holders in ECCE programmes, assess the effectiveness of diploma course and see if Institutions and diploma holders need any further assistance from NCERT to enhance their involvement. With this view, a study was conducted in the year 2009-10 with following objectives:

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the initiatives taken by Institutions and diploma holders with regard to ECCE programmes.
2. To assess the nature and extent of involvement of diploma holders in various ECCE programmes.

3. To find out the perceptions of diploma holders about the utilization of skills acquired and knowledge gained during ECCE diploma course.
4. To identify the areas in which Institutions and diploma holders require attention and assistance from NCERT.

Interaction was made with 58 diploma holders of three batches from 2006 to 2009. Heads of various Institutions RIEs, SCERTs, SIEs, DIETs, SSA offices, NGOs and other private organizations of 23 States/ UTs who deputed diploma holders were sent questionnaires to obtain both quantitative and qualitative information. Questionnaires developed were finalised after pilot testing on 10% of total sample, then translated in Hindi for Hindi speaking States. All the

Twenty-three States/UTs who deputed ECCE diploma holders

Andaman and Nicobar Islands	Kerala
Andhra Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh
Arunachal Pradesh	Manipur
Assam	Meghalaya
Bihar	Mizoram
Chhattisgarh	Nagaland
Haryana	Odisha
Himachal Pradesh	Rajasthan
Jammu & Kashmir	Sikkim
Jharkhand	Uttarakhand
Karnataka	Uttar Pradesh
	West Bengal

questionnaires were sent through post and e-mail. Frequency and percentage was calculated for each of the items in the questionnaire. In accordance with the nature of study, a descriptive reporting was done after analyzing data quantitatively and qualitatively.

Major Findings of the Study

With regard to the initiatives taken by Institutions and diploma holders, the data revealed that there were so many programmes conducted by the Institutions with the involvement of diploma holders. Out of all the programmes 36.9% were related to training, followed by development,

Table 1: ECCE programmes conducted by the Institutions involving diploma holders

<i>Nature of ECCE Programmes</i>	<i>No. of ECCE programmes undertaken by Institutions (Frequency)</i>	<i>Percentage(%)</i>
Research	11	9.9
Teaching	12	10.8
Training	41	36.9
Development	13	11.7
Extension	12	10.8
Advocacy	9	8.1
Monitoring/ Evaluation	7	6.3
Special Focus Group	2	1.8
Other Activities	4	3.6
Total (%)	111	100

teaching, extension, research, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation.

Majority of these programmes were focused especially on the concept of ECCE and policy perspectives. Development, care, behaviour, health and hygiene of children were the content areas considered as core in most of the ECCE programmes. In general all these programmes were aimed at:

- Improving knowledge and skills among teachers and children.
- Creating community mobilization and community participation in ECCE activities.
- Developing innovative techniques of teaching.
- Creating awareness about the contribution of immediate environment on development of children.
- Mainstreaming and Inclusive education.
- Ways and means to establish and develop ECCE centre/ ECCE cell.
- Development of Teaching Learning Material (TLM) such as curriculum, handbooks, manuals, modules, guidelines, audio-visual aids, toys, charts, models and framework.
- Strategies for monitoring and evaluation of ECCE programmes.
- Developing advocacy and awareness about ECCE.

Only few programmes focused on school readiness, linkage and development of communication ability.

It was mentioned by the Heads and diploma holders that apart from successful execution of these

programmes, they faced a number of constraints during planning as well as implementation of such programmes, like:

- Unavailability of adequate funds and resources on time.
- Unavailability of trained man power
- Lack of academic support.
- Lack of coordination and logistics of programmes/ policies/ schemes.
- Partial understanding of monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

Since, ECCE programmes were initiated by diploma holders for the first time, their expectations from these programmes and motivation for initiating good quality programmes was found to be very high. They mentioned that, 'our first priority is to train teachers'.

Therefore, they looked forward to implement maximum number of programmes for teachers (Table 2).

Table 2: Target groups of training/ programmes

<i>Target groups</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage(%)</i>
Teacher	62	38.5
Educational Administrators	2	1.2
Teacher Trainers	7	4.3
Community	6	3.7
Parents	15	9.3
ICDS Functionaries	26	16.1
Children	30	18.6
Other	13	8.0
Total	161	100

Some programmes were targeted to the children, ICDS functionaries and parents. It was also found that very few programmes were conducted for teacher trainers, community and educational administrators. Teachers were trained in the implementation of innovative methods of teaching and use of TLM in classroom. After training, teachers started working sincerely that eventually increased attendance and enrolment of children in pre-school centres.

With regard to the nature and extent of involvement of diploma holders in various ECCE programmes, it was found that, they were involved and they contributed in many ways. In most of the programmes (inside and outside their Institution), they acted as a resource person (34.2%). They coordinated as well as co-coordinated various programmes. They also

Table 3: Involvement of diploma holders in ECCE programmes

<i>Nature of Involvement in ECCE Programmes</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Coordinator	77	21.2
Co-coordinators	18	5.0
Member	35	10.0
Resource person	124	34.2
Supervisors	28	7.7
Evaluator	31	8.6
Consultant	6	1.7
Other	43	11.9
Total (%)	362	100

supported programmes as a member, performed roles and functions of evaluator and contributed as a supervisor of many programmes (Table 3).

It was also found that they coordinated all kinds of ECCE programmes, whether it is capacity building, development of TLM, researches for need assessment and identifying the status of ECCE at various levels, promotion of ECCE, monitoring and supervision of ECCE activities or working for the special focus group children (children with special needs/ SC/ ST, Minorities/ girl child).

Perception of Diploma Holders about the Course

With reference to the perceptions of diploma holders about the utilization of skills acquired and knowledge gained during ECCE diploma course, all the diploma holders were of the view that, diploma in ECCE from DEE, NCERT made them more focused about ECCE. They further reported that they are competent enough to understand various concerns and issues related to ECCE and identify wrong practices as well as loopholes in planning of any programme whether it is related to advocacy, teacher training, research and monitoring or evaluation. They are skilled enough to develop TLM and organise seminars as well as educational visits. They can observe activities of ECCE and provide consultancy to the Institutions working

in this area. After training 55 (95%) out of 58 diploma holders were engaged in various ECCE programmes in their States/UTs/Institutions including their own institution and other institutions in different ways. Their heads were satisfied with their performance.

Few of them were not able to devote even their 10% of time in these ECCE activities from their daily schedule of work, as they were loaded with tasks, not related to ECCE. They have to do their regular teaching as well as conduct various programmes like training/capacity building, advocacy, awareness, extension, community mobilization and programmes for out of school children. They provide consultancy, counselling, academic support to institutions or personals working for school education. In addition to this, they have to be involved in administrative work in their offices. Deputation or attachment of diploma holders to other institutions like DIET and SCERT, etc. Absence of ECCE cell in their institutions are issues which restrain them to devote time in ECCE-related activities. Diploma holders stated that, 'No opportunities were given by office, if given responsibility they will do it with dedication.' They can establish ECCE cell, conduct researches, develop innovative techniques of teaching, organise various kinds of ECCE programmes and act as resource person. Most of them accepted that, 'there is an ample opportunity to work in the area of ECCE in the State/UTs. The need is to take a bold and

positive step towards making ECCE a priority area of work'.

Based on their (diploma holders and their Heads) observations, they had given following suggestions for further improvement in the Diploma Course, if it has to be organised again or if new course has to be developed.

- Syllabus must be updated in order to introduce new topics.
- Modules for the course needs to be developed by the NCERT.
- Duration of the practical and internship must be increased.
- More visits can be organised to various organisations and other States/UTs for observing the condition of ECCE Programmes.
- Adequate time for research/field/project work should be given especially to the trainees from the North-Eastern States (as winter vacations of all the educational institutions in this region falls during the period allotted for research work).
- Deputation should be for field work also and if possible research work should be conducted in Delhi itself.
- Evaluation of assignments and progress report of the trainees should periodically be given and discuss (not at the end) in order to improve their performance.
- Duration of the diploma course should be increased if the same content is to be covered.
- More time should be given for self study and the other activities related

to the course like, development of TLM, writing assignment, power point presentations and preparation for internships and assessment/ test, etc.

- ECCE activities largely depend upon teacher and higher authorities as well as parents and community, therefore, they must be involved. Usually educated parents are benefited from ECCE programmes hence there should be an advocacy of ECCE for illiterate masses of society through this course.
- Same courses must be started in RIEs and if possible at state/ UT level.
- ECCE component should also be included in EDUSAT programmes.

Expectations for Support by NCERT

With regard to the identification of areas in which institutions and diploma holders require attention and assistance from NCERT for effective implementation of programmes are:

- NCERT must take an initiative to suggest Central Government to attach ECCE scheme with DIETs in the States/UTs. Appropriate guidelines for organising these programmes should be provided through DIET and supervision of ECCE centres should also be done by the trained DIET faculty.
- For smooth organisation and running of ECCE programmes letters must be sent through

SCERTs to the DIETs for initiating ECCE programmes.

- In order to strengthen human resources at district and states level, the state authorities should depute more faculty to undergo diploma in ECCE from NCERT.
- Since institutions and diploma holders are not having adequate and appropriate TLM for conducting ECCE programmes, NCERT must provide some support material.
- NCERT must take lead to develop national curriculum on ECCE.
- To equip with current trends and issues in ECCE, NCERT should organize some short term orientation or refresher programmes, especially for ECCE trained personals.

Conclusion

From data analysis and results obtained through the present follow-up study, it can be concluded that Institutions are more involved in ECCE activities in their states/UTs with special emphasis on training. Programmes for special focus groups were almost negligible. In almost all ECCE programmes (inside and outside Institution) services of diploma holders have been utilized. Though diploma holders were loaded with tasks (other than ECCE) in most of the ECCE programmes they acted as a resource person or coordinated the programmes which were targeted especially to teachers and children. All the diploma

holders were satisfied with the training programme. Heads were also satisfied with their performance. Finally, in a view to streamline ECCE activities in their states/ UTs, it is suggested that NCERT must take an initiative in terms of creating more key resource persons through similar courses at RIEs or State/UT level.

Recommendations

- There must be an independent ECCE cell in each Institute for smooth implementation and functioning of ECCE programmes.
- Teacher Training Institutions must be given an academic and financial freedom to organize ECCE programmes.
- States/UTs/Institutions must organize various intervention programmes in ECCE, especially for disadvantaged children by using good techniques and strategies to improve the condition of these children.
- There is a need to organise programmes focusing on school readiness, linkage and development of communication ability in children.
- Diploma holders as well as the States/ UTs/ Institutions should be cautious about aims, objectives and quality of ECCE while planning any ECCE programme. They must design good quality programmes having national as well as international significance that can compel the government and non-government agencies for support and sponsorship to these programmes.
- States/ UTs/ Institutions must give attention to resolve the constraints faced by diploma holders in conducting various ECCE programmes.

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