

Parental Expectations and Their Impact on ECE Classroom Teaching

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Abstract

Early Childhood Development stage is a beginning stage to learn for everyone. Early Childhood Education Pedagogy should therefore be different from pedagogy used in other levels of education. In Nepal, teaching in ECE is not different from teaching in other classes where cognitive level of student is greatly emphasized. This is due to various factors, the major being parental expectation shapes the desire and the environment that they are brought up. The influences of social capital also generate the parents' expectation and schools are forced to adopt the methods like rote memorization and learning the 3Rs accordingly. Schools for their own reputation enforce the teaching of 3Rs ignoring children's holistic development. It has been trusted that physical, social and emotional development is not only confined in the classroom activities because the environment provided outside the classroom also matters for this. If the home environment and social environment are conducive then the child can have multifarious development except cognitive development. So the teachers are emphasizing on 3Rs. Teachers' motivation also matters for adopting the appropriate methods for children because it needs more effort than teaching 3Rs. In addition to this, teacher's exposition to teaching methodology is another factor to motivate the teacher to use child friendly methods in the classroom. All the practices observed in classroom are however not appropriate for the children's holistic development.

Key words: Pedagogy, 3Rs, ECE, Child centered, Cognitive, All round development

Background

Although BPEP has performed different activities in the early childhood education since 1992, the teaching practices in early childhood education has not been satisfactory till now. This is due to the emphasis put on the reading writing and arithmetic i.e. the 3 Rs only, regardless of the children's all round development. Most of the parents expect their children to become academically sound from ECD class so that they would be able to get good result i.e. the parents are very much conscious on the result of their children. I also have personal experience that parents are less interested on the development of other aspects of the child. They generally have a performance on the development of skills in reading, writing and speaking of English as well as well as arithmetic skill.

The development of early childhood education in Nepal started with the establishment of Montessori School in the year of 1949. This school emphasized on the development of the child, without adequate attention on cognitive development. However, this initiative could not continue for long. The future development in this direction appeared in rise of kindergarten schools, which are operating in various forms in different parts of the country. The existing kindergarten schools almost resemble the formal primary schools, which put major emphasis on

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academic aspects as described by Suhail and Bapat (1996) who have observed that:

“In kindergarten children have less freedom to choose activities and they spend less time in activities, which stretch their muscles and imagination. Children are required to learn to read write and count (arithmetic)- the 3Rs(pp88)”

The existing ECE in Nepal is simply a practice, emphasizing 3Rs of English only rather than Nepali (the national language). These practices have been in operation mainly under the pressure of the parents. Therefore, the existing pre primary (ECE) classes have been described as parent-centered rather than child centered.(Tamang1997, pp 4)

The convention on the Rights of the Child has clearly stated that “every child has the right to quality education that is relevant to his/her individual development and life”. (UNICEF, 1999. Pp.8). On the basis of this, ECD can take a new dimension of all round child development. However, this does not appear possible in present context as the existing ECE practices have been emphasizing the intellectual aspect only. UNICEF stated as “in Nepal’s school today artistic, creative and recreation activities are limited.” (UNICEF/NPC, 1996)

Learning for life in the 21st century requires children equipped with basic education in literacy and numeracy as well as more advanced and complex skills for living. These skills can serve as the foundation for life enabling the children to adapt to the life circumstances (UNICEF, 1999, pp.22). For this, the learning environment must also be made active and child centered. It must be linked to the developmental level and abilities of the children such that they are able to express their views, thoughts and ideas.

Though the above statement emphasized on literacy and numeracy, it does not ignore the development of other aspects. The general objective put forth by ECE curriculum has also stressed on the development of the whole child. This also suggests the use of the methods that are helpful for development of all aspects of the child. However, traditionally practised teaching methods emphasizing reading and writing without comprehension have been persistently used in practice, though the children of ECE class are not ready for them (CERID, 1998).

The major problem of ECE at present is concentrated on how to conduct appropriate activities for the overall development of the children through the child centred activities. Child psychology believes on learner centered learning. According to this belief, the child’s interests and aptitudes as well as abilities and tendencies are to be taken into consideration before setting up the goal for child development (Suhail and Bapat, 1996). The existing practice of ECE in Nepal is not in accord with the ECD philosophy, which emphasizes all round development or holistic development of the child.

BPEP has made several attempts to improve the ECE teaching learning practices by conducting various activities such as development of curriculum, preparation of the teaching activities, providing training and distributing the teaching materials etc. However these efforts haven’t come up with very encouraging result so far. Therefore, there is a need to get better understanding of this problem so that the deficiencies of the programme could be diagnosed.

Though there have been several attempts to bring desirable improvements in existing ECE

practices, the results so far have not been very encouraging. It is claimed that these practices are largely influenced by parental expectations and teachers' attitude.

The parental expectation

All parents have their own expectations that their children would acquire the best of education available from the existing schools. The children are expected to have a passive role in the context of their learning. The parents or teachers determine what they should learn. Most of the parents expect that the teachers and the schools make their children sound in academic field.

In this way, it appears that they are more concerned on the academic aspect only rather than on the overall development of the children. There are widespread concerns amongst the parents that children might be “playing all the day” rather than acquiring the basic skills as they see them, the traditional skill of the literacy and the numeracy. Most parents have a particular notion about how well their children should read and write and what numeracy skills they should have by certain age (Sharp and Green, 1975). The observations made in connection of this study were very much similar. The responses of parents have indicated that “sending their children in ECE class from the early age was to develop the habit for attending school.” As one parent observed “whatever activity the teacher performs in classroom, I don’t care. I have a concern mostly on the habit of going to school”. Expressing his experience he added “I got problem to send my first child in school, because I sent him at the age of six. At that time he used to cry to go to school. He never felt happy and he did not enjoy in school for a long time. But my second child does not have such problem. He is happy to go to school. It is because I sent him to school at the age of three. So he developed his habit to go to school”. This expression shows that parents are more concerned with the problem of adjustment in school. In this case parent appears to have gained the knowledge through experience. Their thought appears to be strongly controlled by the consequences of their action (Bandura, pp46).

The above view shows that the experiences of parents also determine their expectations on their children’s education. Biber (1984) has also observed the type of education that the parents want to provide their children is also based upon their own judgment. Such expectations seem to address the preconvention reasoning.

Shaping the Expectation

Parental expectations are influenced by many factors. One of them is the unfulfilment of desires when they are young. The expression obtained from the parents interviewed for the study have also voiced this: The intrinsic interest of getting education by the self is also related with the education of their children. The parents’ expectations from their children are based on their own perception and evaluation. On the basis of this perception and evaluation, the parents’ expectations from school are also shaped. They expect from school that their children will have good base mainly in the academic field. They seek organized syllabus and curriculum for teaching their children.

This has also been observed from the responses given by the parents. They had chosen a school because they thought it had good curriculum and the teacher taught well. The parents’ perceived it as the good teaching if the teacher taught how to read and write alphabets to their children.

As one parent emphatically stated “My child learnt these things within a month. Now she can recognize, read and write the alphabets”. This shows that the parents are more satisfied about what the teachers have been teaching to their children in the schools.

The parental expectations are also developed through observing of others. According to Kohlberg as quoted by Brenda Munsey “the emergence of each normative structure is to be explained as a function of transactions between an individual's present structure and the objective features of moral dilemmas actually arising in his or her social environment.(Munsey1980, pp. 168)

The expectations by parents depend to a large extent upon their sentiments and intuition, which are shaped by social environment. This can also be seen by the responses of the parents regarding the nature of child development. As this statement of a parent indicates: “child development means the development of abilities of how to read, write and behaving well. This should be taught in the class. Teachers need to concentrate on these factors more than other aspects. Growing in body size or balancing the body comes through maturation. And making friends, leading the group etc can be learned from home”. The reason behind this response is the lack of adequate knowledge regarding all round development of the child. Here parents’ experience of schooling has greatly influenced their perspective on thinking regarding child development.

Parental expectation appears to have arisen through the present societal needs also. In general, parental responses indicated that they wanted their children to be more academically sound. Failing of which, they might face the problem of unemployment. So they looked for schools where they could enroll the children. They thought that if the academic background was poor there was no status in the society. Parental expectation seemed to be influenced by social recognition also. As Lawrence Kohlberg stated that each individual acquires his own moral values (Berkowitz 1964,pp44) from the external culture. Here moral values, according to Berkowitz, are the evaluation of action generally believed by the members of a given society either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. In the case of Nepal too, the determination of the expectation is highly influenced by such type of moral value e.g. recognition of qualification.

Most parents are result oriented. They evaluate the teaching activities on the basis of the child’s academic performance, that is, high score in the examination determined by curriculum. So the parents wanted the explicit syllabus focusing 3R’s. In this way, social influence also seems to have a great role for shaping parental expectation. The desire for social conformity prepares the parents to become more similar other group members. Such effect is due to social facilitation (Allport, 1920).

The impact of parental expectations on the existing ECE practices

Parental expectations have an influence on the existing practices. It has been generally observed that parents try to change the school of their children in search of better schools. Regarding the reason for transferring the school, the parents interviewed responded that they preferred the school which could teach reading, writing skills within a short span of time”. This seems to be much in tune with Sharp and Green (1975, pp169), who have observed that “the school competence is measured with the competency of reading, writing and arithmetic gained by the children”. In the case of Nepalese parents, they also evaluate the school by these competencies as

a result of which they shift their children from one school to another to fulfill their expectations.

In the above situation, the parents have generated their reasoning in the perspective of self interested exchanges (stage 2, Kohlberg). As in this case the parents own interest may have a bargain with the school for the fulfillment of their expectations.

Parental expectations play a great role for sharpening existing practice. Although most of the teachers knew how the small children needed to be stimulated for all-round development, they could not do so because, the parents were more interested on the development of cognitive aspect only. In this context, one of the parents selected for study had this typical response.

“My child needs more homework. She should be engaged in reading, writing. If the teacher always lets her play and go outside to collect things and group chatting, how and when will my child learn English”. Almost fifty percent of parents had similar responses. The teachers also appeared to complain in this way “if we didn’t take care of parents’ expectations we will be fired by the headmaster. So we have to emphasize more in class room teaching rather than caring about natural psychological activities for the all round development of the child”.

This indicates that there exists Role confusion (Erikson) due to parental pressures and conflicting demands imposed on the teacher. Some of the trained teachers loose their identity on such practice. Although they want to use their knowledge gained from training they have little room for such exercise. Even if they carry out several activities in the classroom the parents are inclined to evaluate and check the performance through the child’s ability on cognitive aspect only. They rarely notice the changed behaviour of the child and good manners as well as other good habits. So the teachers are compelled to use the methods, which enforce rote memorization. This could also be seen from the response of a principal who said “parents come to me complaining what sort of school is this? As the children are not learning to write alphabets and numerals for all these months, what are your teacher doing till now? Perhaps your teachers are not teaching. Are you checking them frequently?” In such a situation a principal naturally has got to address the social demand which is a social impact as Latene prefers to call it (Latene 1981,1997). To maintain the social reputation of the school, she has to fulfill the parents’ desire. With the fear of this blaming, the teachers suffer from diffusion of social impact (Latene 1981). An easy outlet of all this is the use of methods inappropriate for natural child development.

Though some parents realize the need for all round development, they trust the school as an institution suitable for the intellectual development of the child. For them other aspects of development can also be promoted outside the school. The reason of practicing the conventional method liked by the parents also seems to be based on social interpersonal accord and conformity (stage 3, Kohlberg). The teachers try to use those methods and activities, which are suitable with regard to parental expectations. In this case the important persons for the school principal or teachers are the parents or guardians. If parents perceive the school as a bad school, it may adversely affect the school as well as the teachers in it. Thus, the impact of parental expectation has a great effect on the use of appropriate methods and activities in classroom teaching.

From the above discussion, it is evident that existing ECE practice has been largely influenced by the parental expectations. On the other hand the parental expectations are also determined by various factors. In such a situation the using of existing book based and teacher oriented

practice in classroom is obviously natural in the present context.

Teachers' attitude towards the existing practice

Teachers' attitudes towards teaching are one of the most important factors in education. The development of attitudes also depends on various factors. In many cases, teaching has been used as stepping stone especially on the part of the young teacher. In such a situation, the teaching of the new incumbents becomes a practice, which is guided mostly on the basis of adhocism. They perform their work for the sake of their own job instead of considering child development. *Their views are in contrast to the view of Magoline (1972) who stated that "in the field of ECE, teachers are expected to be emotionally responsive to vulnerability, sensitivity and the need for freedom of young children..... Teachers are however also responsible for gearing the children's intellectual capacities into a variable understanding of certain subject matter areas that will be functionally useful to each child."

The above statement is indicative of teachers' responsibilities towards all round development of children. However the teachers working in the existing ECE programmeme in Nepal are found to be rarely conscious regarding their exact responsibility. It might have been because of their low motivation. In this regard, low salary scales, and lack of performance based evaluation have an influence on the development of such attitudes. The following response is an example, which shows teachers' attitude influenced by the motivational factors:

"I am I. Ed. Passed. According to government salary, I get Rs. 2500. How can I live up with this salary? If I join another job or if I teach in a primary level, I will get more than this. Now I am here because I don't have another job. So I will do this job till I don't get the other."

This mentality clearly shows that the teacher is less motivated. Motivation is one of the important factors for the performance of the job. Another teacher complains about the lack of performance based evaluation saying that "I use the rhyme, games, and teaching materials but my headmaster and others never appreciate my work. They treat me like any other teacher who simply use teacher oriented methods." Same as the previous response this also indicates a lack of motivation. The above two instances indicate a lack of adequate incentives for the motivation of teachers.

The teachers' culture has also an influence on the development of attitude. It is because teacher is also a part of the culture, in which, he/she also socialized to develop the same values, attitude and traditions. Thus, the teacher uses the traditional methods, as demanded by social expectations even though he/she knows the pedagogy of ECE. This is also evidenced from the response of a teacher who said, "I use different activities, which are appropriate for child development. But parents do not recognize them. On the contrary, they complain to the principal that I am not teaching well. Even my principal has suggested me to use the teacher centered methods".

Both the above statements show that the use of teacher- centred traditional methods is due to the expectations of the parents. In this situation, the demand from parents is prominent for the school. It is because the parents pay money for the education of their children and the schools deliver their services. In this case, the principle of reciprocity become a powerful tool of persuasion (Cialdini1984, 1993). Cialdini pointed out that accepting a favour necessarily

leads to sense of indebtedness. Thus the principle of reciprocity derives by principal and the parental expectations are instrumental in shaping the attitude of the teacher. As a result the teachers' behaviour is guided by parental expectations as is also explained by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological psychology.

Another feature of the attitude towards the pedagogy, which is apparently not changing is due to teachers' own inability. This situation is similar to the one mentioned by Sharp and et al (1975,pp169). The authors stated that "the teachers have some difficulty on attempting to operate a child centered approach. They are not skillful and not knowing how to intervene to structure the children's environment for learning the things, they feel important. In order to know what to do with the child aid his intellectual development and thus not allow him to waste all his time playing, one has to know what stage he is at. The key concept of child centered methodology, informality, free choice and integrated day faced with management problem in classroom and increasingly comes to adopt similar strategies for their solution". This statement shows how the teachers are unskillful on applying the method though the teachers know.

In the context of Nepalese schools, teaching in ECE is not different from teaching in other classes where the cognitive level is greatly emphasized. Due to subject teaching methods based on fixed period system, teachers are more concentrated on the prescribed syllabus and curriculum. This focuses on the completion of books. As a result of which, teachers have to follow the traditional methods. The teachers' own experiences also help on using the existing teacher oriented methods. Most teachers use similar method that they were taught at the time of student life. Three teachers responded on the effect of the teaching process by which they were taught by their teachers previously. Three teachers responded in a similar manner. They don't have different experiences. On class observation, I saw the teachers using blackboard to write alphabets and numerical as well as some language exercises. Besides those, they used the method of reciting the book, which is followed by the students. This shows that acquisition of learning is through imitation of the important person, a focal person. The focal person in this learning is the teacher.

Impact of the existing ECD practice in child development and growth

Child development is not only a natural process it is largely influenced by the environment also. As Hurlock (1999) has stated that "the pattern of development for all normal children is approximately same. So it is then possible to evaluate each child in terms of norm for child's age. If development is typical, the child is making normal adjustments to social expectation. Sometimes this development might be deviated from normal pattern. This may be regarded as a danger signal for their proper all-round development. At this time the steps need to be taken for remedies by diagnosing the causes. One of the remedies is providing learning opportunity and encouraging using these opportunities."

In case of our existing ECE practices, appropriate encouragement and opportunities have been lacking to a large extent. Most of the time the children are provided an opportunity to read, write and to do arithmetic. During observation, it was found that children were writing alphabets, words and sentences as well as doing some numerical skills like counting, recognition, writing numerals. Although the appropriate activities for physical and motor development have not been practiced, the development in this aspect is found to be satisfactory. However class

observation showed that students were kept in fixed benches and desks for hours and hours. The children had opportunity for playing in the ground only once a week. For this, the responses of the teachers and principal were varied. Some of them said that it was due to lack of enough playgrounds; some says of no idea about it, while some others thought that it was necessary in order to control the children. All these responses indicated that the uses of developmentally appropriate activities for physical and motor development of the children have been poorly followed. However, the physical and motor development does not depend upon the school activities alone as the children also get an opportunity to play after their school. This is why physical and motor development of children appears to be satisfactory.

Regarding the cognitive and adaptive development, it can be said that children's learning will depend largely on what they are taught. In classroom teaching, teachers have been found to have taught recognize the shape, alphabets, and numerical. This seems to have resulted on children learning reading, writing and numerical concepts and skills. This shows that children's learning in cognitive aspects depends to a great extent upon the methods of teaching carried out by the teachers.

The socio- emotional learning depends largely on the home environment and the intuition of children themselves. In general, the group skills, leadership quality, logical reasoning have been lacking among children. The observation of classroom activities has clearly shown children lacking these aspects. Children show high enjoyment and interest on rhymes and stories, which are natural.

The above observation shows that all round development of the children has been not properly addressed in the classroom activities of the ECE programmeme. Some of the developmental skills learned by children are developed through maturation alone. However, the skills, which are developed through mediation and stimulation, are found less frequently acquired though the children are ready to acquire them. Hurlock has mentioned that "much of the works of early school years involve motor skills such as writing, drawing, painting, clay modeling, dancing and wood work. The more numerous and better these skills are, better the adjustment children will make to school and greater their achievements in the academic as well as the non academic areas of school work." In case of Nepalese schools, the activities like writing and drawing have been found but other important motor skills have not been found acquired on my observation. In such a condition, children get less opportunity for developing appropriate level of motor and physical development. The all round development of children also remains less addressed by the activities done in classroom alone. But as Hurlock has suggested, children's creativity, concept formation as well as other aspects for all round development should have stimulating environment. Both the home and school have a role to play for the all-round development of the children from the very beginning through babyhood to childhood. The existing ECE programmeme appears to be lacking in its provision of appropriate child development activities in the classroom as it gives more concentration on the teaching of 3Rs only. This clearly shows that the activities of the ECE programmeme are not appropriately addressed towards creating a significant impact on all-round development of the child

The all-round development of child is necessary for future development and adjustment. Child development depends on genetic makeup but could be enhanced through providing appropriate environment. In school, teachers need to use appropriate activities. But, due to various reasons

teacher emphasized the teaching of 3Rs only. On the whole, the current ECE practices do not present a very wholesome picture of the child development.

Conclusion

The ECE practice demands different types of teaching methods and activities. These child development oriented methods and activities are still not used appropriately in the Nepalese context. This is primarily due to parental expectations, which can have their own social impact. People develop these expectations on the basis of what they have experienced and what they have seen in society. Teachers' classroom practices are largely shaped on the basis of parental expectations.

Present ECE practices are also shaped by teachers' motivation. The ECE class teachers are less motivated and as their work are poorly recognized. Most of the teachers do not use appropriate child centered methods though they know them. As a result of which all round development of the children is not properly addressed by existing practices. On the basis of class observation, the development of children in different aspects like physical, motor was found satisfactory. Where as, the development on other aspects like logical thinking, reasoning was less satisfactory. The analysis of the observation also showed that activities that the classroom teaching used very few students would stimulate the development of these aspects. As is mentioned in a CERID (1997) seminar paper "most programmes are focused to 3Rs than human development". The existing ECE practices in Nepal are considered as traditional book based and teacher oriented apparently and in the head of teacher as opposed to progressive education, which is directed to all round development based on active interest and participation of the child.

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