

# How did ECD come into existence in Nepalese society?

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## Abstract

*ECD program is an essential for the development of the country. This program helps to produce the good human resources needed for the betterment of the country. Globally, contribution of ECD program in education has been highlighted with the research evidences. However in Nepalese context demand of ECD centers are high and expansion of it is very quick. It has been found that ECD center has been expanded drastically. Major reason of this expansion is due to internal need and external pressure. Different committee has recommended the need of ECD program as preprimary. Global movement also pressurize on the expansion of ECD while the change in social structure also demand for ECD program. Beside this the educated society also realize the positive effect on ECD on the future of the child education and development*

## Introduction

Most of the Nepalese believe that the children are the hope of the future. Such belief lead the society as well as the nation to consider the program that could help the development of children. Traditionally, children were brought up within their own family, which was considered as the best way of childcare. However the practices slowly changed due to the change in other factors in the society. This began to give birth to professional helps in the form of childcare centers, preprimary education, etc. Giving this context I will discuss the existence of ECD in Nepalese society. In this section, I will go through historical background, international pressure, and change in family structure in society as well as educational awareness as major factors that helped ECD to emerge.

## Historical background

The All Round Education Committee (ARNEC) was the first educational commission, which indicated the importance of ECD-especially ECE. On the basis of recommendation made by ARNEC, preprimary classes in Bal Mandir (orphanage in Kathmandu) were established. But the primary classes were found to be ignore other aspects of ECD. HMG/N provided an official definition of preprimary education in the education regulation 2049B.S. stating that “by preprimary education, one should understand the school which provides education for children who have completed five years crossed age of five”. (education regulation 2049B.S. p.p. 2). On the basis of the National Education Commission 1992, proposed the following (p.p. 177) :

- Provision of one-year preprimary education should be encouraged in view of the need and demand of the country.
- The four old should be regarded as fit for admission to the preprimary level. A clear line of distinction should be drawn between a preprimary school and childcare centre.
- Preprimary education should be viewed as prelude to class 1 of primary of the primary education.

With reference to these statements, the scope of ECD has been narrowed down. Keeping these in view, the Eight Five Year Plan (1992-97), made some specific policies on the part of early child care by announcing, “Opening day of care centers for working mothers and

encourage NGO's to execute child welfare program". With this, many NGO's and INGO's under rural development project started the custodial services as the preschool education. These programs included the delivery of most essential services for child survival.

### International Pressure

Since 1959, the time of UN declaration on the right of the child, Nepal has also stepped into the education of child because education is declared as the right of every child. In the similar way in 1989 UN general assembly adopted the convention on the rights of the child on which Nepal is one of the signatories. This convention paved the road for ensuring Nepalese children their right of ECD. In this context, Nepal has launched the program of ECD with the focus of child's total well being and development both emotionally and intellectually. The children are considered as the human resource of the nation, which is emphasized by USAID (1995) in the line of human capacity building stating that (Human capacity building centre, USAID, 1995). "Early childhood development is the first stage of comprehensive strategy of human capacity building of young child, avoiding developmental delays, ensuring psychological support and reducing the disparities in preparation for school. In the early year of human life learn fundamental skills and develop in the ways that are critical to their success in the future education. In short, they develop the capacities that will enable them to be full participant in a sustainable society."

In this way, USAID stressed that investment in human capital is an important factor for the overall economic development of the nation. This can be exemplified through the priority given to the program. Though UNICEF has supported child development initiatives in many countries since early 1980s, ICDC (International child development centre) vitalize the issues by putting four major program areas including need of the urban child. The purpose of ICDC is to strengthen the capacity of UNICEF and its cooperating institutes to foster and emerging global ethic that response to the needs of children and their families. In 1988, International child development centre ICDC was started to operate within part of a hospital Spedale Degli Innocenti in Italy. The centre since then has been serving as a vehicle and the voice for changing public policies related to children. As ICDC and UNICEF both are interested on the matter of child welfare, each of them took different responsibilities to avoid duplication. UNICEF's effort concentrated on training, seminar, where as ICDC's effort focused on policy issues and problem solving techniques, (Innocenti, 1989). UNICEF and other international donors recognized the investment in ECD after visualizing the long-term benefit due to the following situations :

- Rapid urbanization and disruption of stable family units.
- The dramatic increase of women entering the labor force and inadequate resource for childcare.
- The severe negative long term social consequences resulting from neglect of children's development.
- The economic and structural difficulties involved in the provision of basic education services.
- A need to sustain recent gains in child survival through empowering parents to provide effective childcare.

Viewing the world's realities the international donors and government turn their attention towards comprehensive programs of ECD in Nepal as well as in other countries. However, nations denied investing in the area due to not having convincing argument. Such skepticism,

disbelief and negative attitude raised in the nation was convinced through the well-debated social and economical arguments. On the basis of these, Myers elaborated eight arguments (Myers, 1993). This argument reinforces on the validation of investment on early year of a child. Thus skepticism and negative attitudes were subsided. In the accomplishment of the objectives drawn for the Innocenti Global Seminar, UNICEF prepared a report on the status of child development initiatives within their respective countries. This leads to ECD intervention in Nepal as well. Like in most developing countries, the child is most deprived of attention, nurturing and inputs s/he needs for mental, emotional and social development (UNICEF 1996, pp111).

Nepal also ratified on the convention on the child right on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1990. Following the ratification, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, Law Reform commission, the ministry of Law and Justice and Parliament, drafted the Children Act in 1992. The Act guarantees the equal right of children, regardless of gender, caste, religion, language or social status, to health, education, water, sanitation and protection. It also includes parental responsibilities towards their children, welfare provisions to be guaranteed by the government. The aspect related to child health, nutrition and education has been considered on the National program of action for children and development. In this regard, the early childhood care center, early childhood education centre and parental awareness programs have been initiated by different GO's, NGO's and INGO's

#### **Change in family structure**

The demand of ECD program is rooted on the concern over the intellectual development and educational opportunity or it reflects the other social phenomena. But in the context Nepal, it reflects both the phenomenon but I will deal with the social phenomena only. Like other developing countries, Nepal is also stepping on in the field of early childhood development program. The demand of ECD came out as UNICEF identified due to the process of urbanization, and change in economic situation, work pattern, etc.

In the same line, Cochran (1993) in his investigation of the macrosystem of 29 countries found the casual factors for the demand of ECD program and policy. His casual factors included the urbanization and industrialization, loss of traditional family, structural roles, subordination of women, political change or conflict labor shortage/surplus, immigration/migration, poverty or declining living standards, inadequate preparation for school, changes in birth rate, lack of services and infrastructures are the major. However Cochran Futher mentions that "Poverty and school preparation are coupled because it is typically those children living in low income families who do not have access to those activities that prepare them for school experience"(Penn 1996,pp 630).

As Cochran has mentioned, in the context of Nepal also, the casual factors that created the need of ECD are mostly the poor children who are deprived of ECD activities. ECD programs are influenced by the change in socio-economic status and demography of the country (BPEP Masterplan, 1997). There have been significant change in socio-economic status as well as demography of the country within the past few decades. One of the major changes is the growing urbanization, which impact on life of the people. The expansion of transportation and communication systems also exposed the status of children. People from villages and rural areas shifted towards the town and cities. As they came to the cities they have to line in nuclear and small family. Due to inflation, expensiveness, demand of

the new technology in daily life, change in living standard, both parents need to earn. As the result of which, both parents need to go to work for their livelihood. This made parents to find help in childcare. This situation generated the need of ECD centre where parents would be able to leave their children more safely, securely and with good care. This is clearly expressed by the working mother whose child goes to Essel world. She said “Due to difficulty in adjusting with the traditional family I decided to live separately. I go to the office. I hired a servant but she didn’t look after my child well. One day I came back earlier and found my child weeping. The maid was not there. I saw her chatting with the neighbor leaving my child alone so I did not feel secure and safe to leave the child with her any longer.” Similarly, another mother who moved to the city because of her husband’s job couldn’t afford a maid. So she started sending her 11months old child to the centre.

The experiences of these mothers indicate that the change in family structure due to change in values and the economic hardship as well as changing in demography demand childcare services. These responses clearly show how family structure has made impact on the demand of ECD. The change in the family structure is due to change towards modernization i.e. the new way of living, using the new technology, and becoming free and independent. As society turn into modernization the women also wanted to participate on the family affairs as well as developmental and social affairs. It can be observed by the response given by Sunita, whose child goes to the unorganized centre; and lives in a nuclear family. Sunita said that in joint family she did not have any say. She was just expected to do household chores. She confidently added that “now I can decide on my own. I can fulfill my rights and responsibility simultaneously without unnecessary pressures.”

Sunita’s response also indicates that family structure in Nepal is changing due to various factors such as change in values, attitude and perception. It can be thus concluded that migration; change in belief; systems and traditional values are the main factors for disintegration of the families. “The disintegration is due to new generation growing up with new technological and scientific progress as well as the daily confrontation with radically new practical possibilities to entertain radically new modes of thought. This may form a link between a new culture and new form of society allowing for ways to balance on the new way of life” (Erikson1968, pp38). As mentioned above the Nepali families also have to face the rapid changing world due to technical and scientific progress. To cope with this rapid change people have to participate in every aspect of development, which resulted in massive relocation and change in traditional thought. This above view can be clearly visualized by the present trend of family structure in Nepal. This is valid in case of modern mothers too, which can be justified by the following statement.

“... I would like to make it easier by using affordable and available facilities, such as the gas stove, which are not accepted by my in-laws. Every proposal, I put was discarded by them. So I could not adjust there and finally my husband and I decided to live separately”. This indicates that the younger generation is more inclined to use material comfort of the modern society, which are still not accepted to people who are used to conventional methods.

The splitting of family shows the change in the role of mother. Historically, under individualized organic solidarity, the mother is not important because childcare was a sole responsibility of nanny, governor and tutor. In case of Nepal, the responsibility is layed on

elder children also. As evolution and changes in practice occurred childcare services slowly evolved, and the responsibility sifted more towards the institutionalized centre. However, it comes through the replication of action or through modification of action. Similarly, the childcare practice also evolve and change, which came on society through exposition by means of transportation and communication. As the result of which, the scientific way of childcare is demanded by the society. The older people like grand mother and older siblings are not able to take care in such a way.

In response to the changes and demand, two types of program began to emerge. One set of programs was established principally to care for orphanage and street as well as indigent children. Upper classes women, where protective and custodial services are offered, (Myers1993), often run this social welfare programs. The other programs also evolved that catered primarily to the growing urban middle class, providing more enrichment and stimulation than protection and custodial care.

As in the experiences of mothers of Nepal, Keele and Eggleston (1974) has also come up with three similar reasons for ECD. First one is the changing nature of family in modern society, second is growing understanding of the usage of language patterns and the third one is alleviation educational handicap and social deprivation. Keeping view on these reasons, the change in family structure is related with the first reason of Keele and Eggleston. In this context, the learning experiences of a child in the home are often diminished to the comparison with that of earlier generation. In addition to this, the trend of leaving the child with family in Nepal is also isolating. This trend influences child development. As Keele and Eggleston states “living in the housing estate or in the block of flats, the growing child may only have a very little opportunity to experience the childhood life, because they are mainly in contact with the adults only”. Additionally, an economic condition of the families as well as social reasons also enforced on joining job by mothers when the child is still at an early age. These conditions desperately enforced the parents to send their children to ECD centers.

This has been stressed by the response given by the principal of one of the ECD centers selected for study. She said, “Most people who come to the city are busy. No one knows another. No place to gather and play for the children. So children spend whole day inside room, watching TV- if parents can afford. They don’t have playmates, they just communicate with the people who dropped in. As a result children become aloof from the same age group”.

The above expression shows the condition of childhood, which is inappropriate for them, because Katz and Chard (1993), discussing the importance of developing the dispositions of curiosity, friendliness and cooperation in children, pointed out that good preschool programs support the development of such traits. These personal dispositions cannot be directly taught. They can develop under appropriate circumstances as the by-products of children’s engagement in appropriate and active learning experiences. This suggests the need of looking at suitable circumstances and program strategies that support the development of children, which could be found in children centre.

Apart from that, in a small family the role of mother is added. She does not have enough time to spend with her child, which seeks extra helping hand in childcare. However, in this regard most parents have negative attitude towards the maid. In their experience, maids are not reliable, they don’t take care well, they even eat the baby's foods keeping the baby

hungry, and they are not sincere.

One of the major comments of the parents is language that is used by the maid. Most maids use the restricted code (Bernstein 1965) and shameful words. The children learn the words and use them to communicate due to their imitation nature. This is not legitimate in the society as well as it hampers child's language development. Further, the acquisition of restricted code may be barrier for the child to adjust later in large society like school. In contrast, acquisition of elaborated code of language helps the children to make own decisions to adjust in society later. This fact is well understood by the parents so they extremely opposed the idea of appointing maid for childcare. These understanding inforce them to send their children in ECD centers. This shows how the social change influence in the structuration of the daily practice in the field of childcare.

The essentiality of ECD centre is emerged due to extreme indulgence towards the children also. This problem arises by the structure of family. The small family and late married couple gives high priority to the children. Most of these parents fulfill any demand of their children, which make children pampered. Even the educated and employed parents fulfill every demand of the children due to lack of quality time for their children. So the parents cannot discipline them. As a result the parents like to send their children to the centre in order to maintain the discipline.

All the above facts show that the structure of family changed as the change in time resulting change in thinking of the society. The cry has gone up for childcare for mothers who are on the jobs and who are aware of the childcare. The existing ECD centers seem to have aided parents go through the changes on one hand and on the other hand fulfill their children's developmental needs as they aspired for in a secured environment.

#### **Educational awareness**

As the time changes the awareness towards the education has also increased. This increasement in awareness took place because of two factors. Firstly, increase in number of educated parents and other is due to the imitations of other-the exposure of different ways of lives. Durkheim saw the major function of education is the transmission of the societies' norms and values. This has been falsified in this case, because the educated people are focused to be turning towards modern life styles and ignored the society's traditional norms and values. This is happened so because the society have to survive in a rapidly changing world and to keep up with process of globalization. For this, the parents are looking for newer options in lives. They want to be involved in social and academic activities like joining workforce outside of homes. Thus they want to be with their children, they are not able to do so because of economic and social demands. So they look for the trusting environment where they can leave their children. Besides, the educated people are more exposed to the knowledge of child development, which makes them to change the traditional childcare practices. One of the parents confessed that "my mother-in-law wants to help with childcare but she uses the traditional way, where the child is nourished by feeding, laying down to sleep, and taking care of health. She does not have an idea of stimulation and mediation for language development, physical development, social development and emotional development, which is more suitable for children's all round development. So I chose the center where the care givers know child development stimulation practices." This view also confirms the educational awareness of parents resulting in a demand for

professional childcare program.

In addition to this educated parents are more concerned about educating their children. They believe that children can learn with their same age group. They confirm Bourdieu claim that 'the success of all school education depends fundamentally on the education previously accomplished in the earlier years of life'. So they want to send their children to ECD centre. This is supported by the responses of parents of Jib Kamal and Essel world as well. The parents and the directors responded that sending their children to the centers are to enhance the possibility of success in the future education and life. Children learn more in the school because they find convenient atmosphere. And they also learn more easily from the peers. One of the parents responded by comparing her two children "my second child who attend ECD centre is more intelligent than the first one. The second child is doing better than the first one in every aspect. It is because of early exposition with the peer groups."

Some of the views that I have collected from illiterate parents also show a greater consciousness of education, child behavior formation and child development. They believe that sending their children to ECD in early years is more beneficial for the sake of the child development as well as habit formation. This has also been conformed by the findings of CERID's evaluation of Sishu (ECD) class (CERID 1997). In regard to the educational awareness one of the parents' responded that "we were deprived of such opportunity. But now a day, such type of facility is available. And most of the parents are utilizing such facilities. I think it is very necessary for the children for their future life. So I am sending my 15mths old child to the centre." This view clearly shows the enhanced awareness about education. The degree of parents' interest in their children education has also influenced the increased utilization of the centers.

Educational awareness along with the change in family structure, demographic change, changes in life style, etc. have demanded the need for ECD. It can be confirmed by the statistics of underage children in first grade student, which is 13percent. In the changing context, ECD program are on one hand responding to the change and on the other they themselves are influencing the change by convincing the parents with their relevant and necessary input to the children. The data shows that parents are very much hurried to send their children into the school. The reason of this is the keenness in the children's early education. So under this situation, the ECD programs benefitted the society.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of ECD is merely new in the context of Nepal. However, though different practices of childcare have been carried out for more than a decade, the real philosophy had not been addressed yet. Now with the realization of the children as a part of the society and the recognition of real need of child, the new concept and the philosophy has been considered in present practice in Nepal. As the result of which, the ECD program has been popular and familiar in the Nepalese society. Not only the pressure imposed by external world but also the people of the country, as they exposed and educated, realize that the early age intervention is most important for the future of the child as well as the nation. Besides that the changes faced by the people in socio-economy, demography and techno-scientific world also generated the need of ECD. This needs, eventually influenced on the social, cultural, economical and political field if the Nepalese society.

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