

Early Childhood Education Administrators' Perspectives on Preschool Teachers' Training Program and Professional Development in Early Childhood Settings

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Abstract- *This research explores the role of early childhood education administrators in preschool teacher training programs and professional development within early childhood settings. As the foundation for lifelong learning, the quality of early childhood education significantly influences children's cognitive and social development. This research highlights the critical role that effective training and professional development play in equipping preschool teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address the diverse needs of young learners. Further, Early childhood administrators collaborate with preschool teachers to create an environment that promotes learning for young children. Through their collaboration with early childhood education teachers, administrators ensure a pedagogical approach that aligns with young learners. Through a survey administered to early childhood education administrators, this research utilised a mixed-method approach to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey examines various aspects, including the qualifications, years of experience, and training programs undertaken by early childhood education administrators as well as teachers. The research was conducted in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, with survey participants selected from preschools in the Manmunai Southwest Education/D.S. Division of Batticaloa District, Sri Lanka. It has been determined that several factors are important to consider when conducting a preschool teacher training program. Finally, the research recommends that early childhood education administrators enhance the teachers' training program and the development of professional skills.*

Keywords: *Early Childhood Administrators, Training Programs and Professional Development, Early Childhood Settings.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of early childhood education (ECE), administrators play a pivotal role in shaping the quality of educational experiences for young learners. This research focuses on understanding the perspectives of early childhood education administrators concerning preschool teachers' training programs and professional development within early childhood settings. As demand for high-quality ECE programs grows, the importance of knowledgeable and skilled preschool teachers becomes crucial. Administrators are uniquely positioned to influence the policies and practices related to staff training, yet their insights and experiences are often underrepresented in existing literature (Pathirana, 2017a). The purpose of professional development in early childhood education is to enhance educators' skills and competencies. This includes workshops, mentorship, peer collaboration, and ongoing education personalised to the unique needs of young children and their learning environments. Administrators play a key role in identifying training, allocating resources, and fostering a culture of continuous learning among staff (Aturupane and Little, 2021). The primary roles of early childhood education administrators include overseeing finances and budgets, as well as advocating for the programs. Overall, administrators in early childhood education are responsible for overseeing the coordination of programs to promote the welfare of young children (Warnasuriya et al., 2020). Their perspectives can provide valuable insights into the barriers and facilitators affecting professional development initiatives, as well as the perceived impact on educational outcomes (Douglass, 2019). By examining the views of ECE administrators, this research aims to explore the early childhood education administrators' perspectives on staff training and professional development in early childhood settings. Doing so, it seeks to contribute to the broader

understanding of effective leadership strategies in early childhood settings and the implications for enhancing workforce quality. Ultimately, this study will highlight the importance of aligning administrator perspectives with the evolving demands of early childhood education, ensuring that educators are adequately prepared to meet the diverse needs of children and families.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM / REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section discusses the provision of early childhood education in Sri Lanka, administrators' qualifications as well as teachers' qualifications, and available resources.

Sri Lankan early childhood education has been managed and implemented by Private owners, and non-governmental organisations were responsible for early childhood education in Sri Lanka in the 1980s, with the first policy document titled *Early Childhood Care and Development in Sri Lanka* issued by the National Committee of Inquiry on the Young Children in 1986 (Abesooriya, 2020). This first policy document does not specify a unique body responsible for early childhood education in Sri Lanka.

In 2019, the Early Childhood Care and Development Unit introduced a policy document named the *Corporate Plan for Early Childhood Care and Development in Sri Lanka* (Abesooriya, 2020). The policy document states that the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs has been given the accountability for Sri Lanka's overall childhood development, while the Ministry of Health is entrusted with children's health and nutrition. However, this policy document does not specify the kind of responsibility delegated to the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs. Hence, the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs does not have exclusive responsibilities for overall childhood development since certain responsibilities are delegated to other ministries. Although Sri Lanka has early childhood education policies and regulations.

Considering Sri Lanka preschool teachers, it has been reported that a shortage of qualified professionals in the field of early childhood education in Sri Lanka,

with less than half of the preschool teachers fulfilling the requirements of early childhood education (The World Bank, 2019; Shyamali & Seneviratne, 2022). In addition to this, "When it comes to Early Childhood Educators, 59.9% of the 28,449 preschool teachers have passed the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) Examination" (Shyamali & Seneviratne, p. 297). According to Mukunthan (2020), preschool teachers need academic qualifications; however, most Sri Lankan preschools lack the necessary qualifications and professionalism. The shortage of qualified teachers in Sri Lanka's Batticaloa district is a major challenge to quality early childhood education.

Strehmel (2016) further suggests that administrators' leadership techniques play a vital role in determining the effective implementation of early childhood education. Similarly, Erke et al. (2019) agree that having suitable leadership qualifications enables administrators to make quality decisions and the expansion of early childhood education. Erke et al. (2019) revealed that the lack of effective leadership skills among administrators poses a significant obstacle to professional development in early childhood educational institutions. Additionally, Erke et al. (2019) and Strehmel (2016) note that it is essential to enhance professional training and support managerial skills for administrators. These measures are crucial for enabling administrators to fulfil their roles effectively and motivate improvements in early childhood education for young learners (Erke et al., 2019; Strehmel, 2016).

Resources are crucial for early childhood education to facilitate the activities of the teaching and learning process (Frimpong, 2021). However, the UNICEF (2023) report indicated that the early childhood education sector in Sri Lanka is affected by a shortage of resources, having a detrimental impact on the quality of early childhood education. Preschools owned by private entities have increased in number due to poor government funding. 71% of Sri Lankan preschools are managed by private organisations or individuals (Warnasuriya et al. 2020). The effect of leaving the preschool education delivery to the private sector is that the curriculum is largely unregulated and non-standardised (UNICEF 2023). In addition, it is expensive for children from low-income families to

enroll in private preschools. According to The World Bank (2019), children from low-income families make up only 39% of the preschool registration in Sri Lanka. Thus, Sri Lanka, according to the World Bank (2019) report, should increase its investments in education, especially preschool education, to keep up with other middle-income countries. Enhanced financial assistance may lead to accessible and

Aim of the research

This research aims to explore the early childhood education administrators' perspectives on preschool teachers' training and professional improvement in early childhood settings. By identifying factors that hinder and enable staff training and professional development, and continuing to explore the related research literature internationally, the research will propose practice and research recommendations to enhance staff performance and improve student outcomes in the Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka.

In this way, these are the aims of the research:

To explore and identify the specific professional development needs and training gaps perceived by early childhood administrators, focusing on the skills and knowledge that are needed to enhance staff performance and improve student outcomes.

To investigate the perspectives and attitudes of early childhood administrators regarding the importance of ongoing professional development and training, and how these influence their decisions on resource allocation and program implementation.

To examine the challenges and barriers faced by early childhood administrators in providing adequate training and professional development opportunities for their staff, including financial, logistical, and time-related constraints.

To develop recommendations and best practices for fostering professional learning within early childhood settings, based on the insights gained from administrators' perspectives on effective training strategies and support systems.

Research questions

The primary research question addressed in this study is:

What are the perspectives of early childhood education administrators on the effectiveness and importance of staff training and professional development in early childhood settings in the Batticaloa district, Sri Lanka?

To address the primary research question, several sub-questions have been formulated. These include:

1. What specific professional development needs and training gaps do early childhood administrators perceive as necessary for enhancing preschool teachers' performance and improving student outcomes?
2. How do early childhood administrators perceive the importance of ongoing professional development and training?
3. What challenges and barriers do early childhood administrators encounter in providing adequate training and professional development opportunities for preschool teachers, particularly in terms of financial, logistical, and time-related constraints?
4. What recommendations and best practices can be developed to foster professional learning within early childhood settings based on early childhood administrators' insights regarding effective training strategies and support systems?

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is important for identifying early childhood education administrators' perspectives on preschool teachers' training programs and professional development in early childhood settings, as well as providing suitable recommendations to enhance staff performance and professional growth. Furthermore, few studies focus on administrators' views in assisting with the improvement of preschool teachers' training programs and professional development, with less attention given to administrators' involvement in these areas. However, this study also explores the contributions and difficulties faced by administrators when trying to improve staff training programs and professional development. The significance of studying

administrators' involvement in enhancing the preschool teachers' training program in early childhood education extends to various aspects. Firstly, administrators hold a pivotal role in establishing the vision and objectives of educational institutions. Acknowledging the importance of staff development training programs can help prioritise and allocate resources toward supporting professional development. Secondly, administrators can foster collaboration among educators, parents, and other stakeholders to create an environment development of professional skills. Moreover, administrators demonstrate their commitment to exceptional education by actively engaging in the enhancement of staff training programs. By acknowledging the significance of staff training programs and taking proactive measures, administrators can contribute to establishing a solid foundation for preschool teachers' professional development as well as academic achievement and lifelong learning.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The Research Approach: Mixed Methods

In research, a mixed method is the systematic integration of qualitative and quantitative data within a single investigation (Regnault et al. 2018). Mixed methods are adaptable to many study designs in terms of methodological flexibility because the findings serve both qualitative and quantitative data outcomes. Mixed methods were considered appropriate in this research to provide an in-depth understanding of the early childhood administrators about preschool teachers' training programs and professional development.

Target Population

This research has chosen 24 administrators in early childhood education to understand their views, opinions, and emotions regarding preschool teacher training programs and professional development. All participants were from the Batticaloa district in Sri Lanka.

Research Design

The research question focused on the perspectives of early childhood education administrators on the

effectiveness and importance of staff training and professional development in early childhood settings in the Batticaloa district, Sri Lanka. Investigating these elements in this study can solely be accomplished by employing tools that gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Surveys are the most widely used instruments for data collection. Depending on the structure of the study questions, surveys can gather both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2017). In this study, the method of data collection utilised was a survey.

The survey consists of four sections. The initial section addresses the demographic profiles of both the respondents and preschool teachers. Section 02 pertains to the availability of training programs for preschool teachers, while the remaining section focuses on the key factors, challenges, and barriers faced by early childhood administrators in delivering sufficient training and professional development opportunities for preschool teachers. The final section covers the recommendations and best practices that can be developed to foster professional learning within early childhood settings.

Sampling

The research was conducted in the Eastern province of Sri Lanka, with participants selected from a random sample of early childhood administrators from preschools in the Manmunai Southwest Education / D.S. Division, situated in the Batticaloa district. For this research, 24 early childhood education administrators were selected to participate in this research. These participants must be experienced and qualified in the early childhood education sector. The researchers considered participants who have experience of three years or more than three years in early childhood education. Early childhood education administrators who are the District Coordinator (DC) - 01, Regional Assistant Director (RAD)- 02, and Preschool principals -22 participated in this research.

V. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Demographic Data

The demographic data focuses on the qualifications, years of experience, and training programs undertaken by early childhood education administrators. It is

noted that all early childhood education administrators completed the General Certificates in Education Advanced Level (G.C.E A/L), (SLQF Level 2) Qualifications. Moreover, when we look at the degree level of the qualifications, only 15 early childhood education administrators have Bachelor degree certificate (63%), while 7 early childhood education administrators have not completed Bachelor degree in their respective field.

Regarding the early childhood education administrators' experience, the highest number of administrators (84%; n=20) had ten years of early childhood education experience, while the remaining administrators were similarly allocated at 8% each between 5 years and 6 years of early childhood education experience. (See Figure 1).

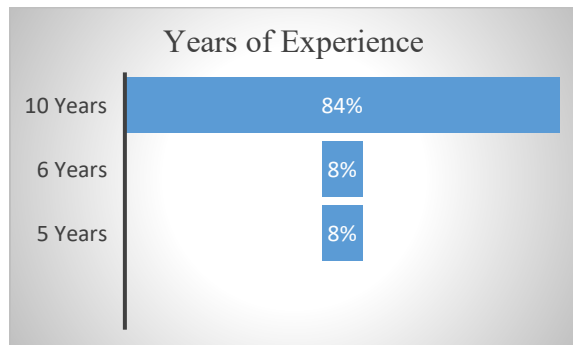


Figure 01.

The early childhood education administrators were also queried to report on the completed professional training program for preschool teachers, and the results are reviewed in Table 01.

A professional training	Participants
Diploma in relation to early childhood education	20 (84%)
Leadership training program	18 (75%)
ECCD related to Master training program	10 (42%)
Diploma in early childhood development	13 (54%)
Diploma in Counselling	20 (84%)

Table 01: Professional training program.

Furthermore, the early childhood administrators were asked about the availability of sufficient funds to provide the training program for preschool teachers, and the results are displayed in Figure 02.

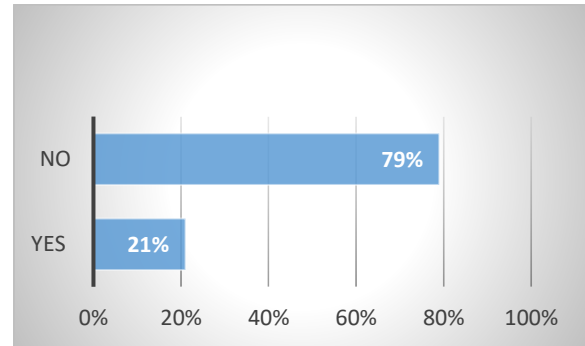


Figure 02

The analysis of the data revealed that only 21% of the early childhood administrators have enough funds to provide the training program to preschool teachers, while 79% of the early childhood administrators have not received enough funds to provide the training program for preschool teachers.

When asked about the challenges faced by early childhood administrators when conducting the training program for preschool teachers in Sri Lanka, administrators pointed to the element of training, which includes pre-service training and in-service training programs. Pre-service training entails the training provided to preschool teachers before they begin their careers, while in-service training involves continuous career advancement programs to improve teachers' skills and knowledge. In terms of the challenges, they outlined the problems faced concerning in-service training and pre-service training required of preschool teachers. The issue was explained by them, noting that the pre-service training of preschool teachers goes beyond the academic aspects and includes identifying children with different abilities to understand the best approaches to use while teaching.

Moreover, the administrators indicated that in-service training programs are essential to preschool teachers to support them in refreshing their knowledge and keeping updated on the advancements in overall development for preschool children. However,

participants' interview responses further explained that there was inadequate in-service training for preschool teachers across Sri Lanka. As well as preschool teachers, do not have regular in-service training.

In addition, they noted that there was no pre-service training for preschool teachers in Sri Lanka as a preparatory step to teach preschool children. The lack of pre-service training programs revealed that preschool teachers encountered difficulty in obtaining the required skills and knowledge to support children their language learning. At the same time, administrators pointed to a lack of funds and resources as a hindrance to the pre-service training of preschool teachers, which can affect the children's knowledge and skills. Administrators indicate that adequate funding of pre-service training programs is required to ensure comprehensive pre-service training programs for preschool teachers. Further, they also indicated that more pre-service training of preschool teachers is required to ensure the improvement of their skills. They highlight that he believes that currently, preschool teachers do not receive adequate pre-service training on language development, and hence, there is a need to expand the existing pre-service training programs. They highlight that he believes that currently, preschool teachers do not receive adequate pre-service training on language development, and hence, there is a need to expand the existing pre-service training programs.

VI. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Recommendation

The subsequent recommendations are proposed as methods to achieve this objective.

The Government's initiative to implement a National Preschool Teachers' Training Program aims to guarantee a standardised training curriculum for all preschool educators prior to the commencement of their teaching careers.

This training is designed to enhance preschool teachers' skills, knowledge, and self-assurance, as they will gain greater confidence in their teaching practices, having all obtained the necessary national training qualifications as a foundation. For preschool

children, this will enhance their classroom experiences, as teachers will be more effectively trained.

Enhance between administrators and preschool teachers:

To foster regular communication and collaboration between early childhood education administrators and preschool teachers to gather insights on training program effectiveness. Regular meetings, focus groups, and feedback sessions can help ensure that professional development initiatives are aligned with teachers' real-world experiences and needs.

Evaluate and revise training programs regularly:

Establish a framework for the continuous evaluation and revision of preschool teachers' training programs based on administrator and teacher feedback, outcomes assessments, and the latest educational research.

Regularly updating and refining these programs ensures they remain appropriate and efficient in meeting the evolving requests of educators and young learners.

By acting on these recommendations, early childhood education administrators can play a significant role in shaping effective training programs and professional development chances that enhance the quality of education in preschool settings.

CONCLUSION

Early childhood education administrators recognise that effective preschool teacher training and professional development are vital for creating quality learning environments. By prioritising structured onboarding, fostering collaborative learning communities, and emphasising cultural competence, administrators can empower educators to meet the various requirements of young learners. Ongoing investment in these training programs not only enhances teaching practices but also leads to better outcomes for children and families. A strong commitment to skilled preschool teachers builds a solid foundation for lifelong learning, ensuring all children have the chance to thrive during their formative years. The findings reveal several factors

that can enhance preschool teachers' training programs and professional development in early childhood settings. Consequently, the research offers important recommendations for implementation within the Sri Lankan preschool education system. These suggestions could support the development of quality early childhood programs. If successfully adopted by the Government, policymakers, and preschool administrators, these recommendations could raise teaching standards and improve preschool teachers' training and professional development across Batticaloa district, Sri Lanka.

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