

Original Article

Early Childhood Education Degree programme for Non-State Higher Education Institutes in Sri Lanka – Need Survey

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ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the foundation of education which helps to develop the child's cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects. Unquestionably ECE educators play a vital role. Hence, teacher education in early childhood context is very important. However currently in Sri Lanka only very few state universities conduct Bachelor of Education in ECE and Primary Education and while other Non-State Higher Education institutes (NSHEIs) offer Early Childhood Education degrees affiliated to foreign universities. Further, presently no NSHEI offer the Ministry of Education or University Grants Commission approved degree in Early Childhood Education. Hence in this context objective of the study is to investigate the need for the Bachelor of Education ECE Degree programme at NSHEI in Sri Lanka. Study conducted in one of the prominent NSHEIs (ABC institute) in Sri Lanka. Therefore, Case study method adopted, and quantitative measures have been complemented with the qualitative measures. Sample size is seventy-five student teachers at ABC institute. This is a survey research and data collection methods are questionnaire for student teachers and key informant interviews conducted with some key stakeholders in the state universities and three preschool owners in Colombo district. Results of the study revealed that benefits of the ECE Degree to students and for the country and emphasized it is very crucial to commence the ECE programme as it provides more opportunities to students since few opportunities and capacity restraint in state universities. Furthermore, study highlighted that ninety six percent student like to start ECE Degree and if the institute commence the programme ninety percent student would like to join the programme. Therefore, study can be concluded

that ABC as a NSHEI there is a good potential and opportunity to proceed with the ECE Degree and contribute to the foundation of the education in the country which add value to the system.

Index Terms: Early Childhood Education, Teacher Education, ECE Degree, Non-state higher education institutes

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education is the foundation of education which helps to develop the child's cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects. Early Childhood Education (ECE) has established via United Nation sustainable goal development and promoted the early childhood development [1]. Further The most vital favourable experiences in the early years of life come from fostering care and safety received from parents, family, and community, which have lifelong benefits including improved health and wellbeing, and improved ability to learn and develop [2]. In order to do this, teacher in early childhood education plays and crucial role in child's life. Therefore, teachers in early childhood education are the keystone. Hence the teacher education in early childhood context is very vital. Early childhood teachers or educators are the critical determinant of learning, and they help and place the basis for learning and exploration for the rest of a child's life. Previous studies indicated that deprived of early education, children are possible to fall over behind during the course of their academic careers [3].

Currently in Sri Lanka very few state universities conduct Bachelor of Education in ECE or Primary Education and while other Non-State Higher

Education institutes (NSHEIs) offer Early Childhood Education degrees affiliated to foreign universities. However presently no NSHEI offer the Ministry of Education or University Grants Commission (UGC) approved degree in Early Childhood Education. In this backdrop ABC Campus as a leading NSHEI realized the need for the Degree in Early Childhood education.

ABC-Campus is one of Sri Lanka's largest private higher education organisations, situated in an administrative capital of Sri Lanka. ABC-Campus was established in 30 years back with the vision of making every effort to build sustainable working partnerships with industry, professional organizations, and other stakeholders, and to serve in the best interest of its customers. Further ABC campus works very closely with the Ministry of Education (MOE) as a NSHEIs.

Due to the capacity restraint in state sector, Higher Education Institutes need for the participation in parallel system of private sector Higher Education has emerged [4]. Secondary school graduates who cannot enter the state university as a consequence of limited capacity need option to continue their higher education dreams. Therefore, it is required the long-term plans in Sri Lanka to increase the higher educational opportunities all over the country [5]. According to the budget proposal 2017 Interest Free Student Loan Scheme (IFSLS) is implemented by the Ministry of Education with the aim of increasing higher education opportunities to wider student community with the affiliation of NSHEIs [6]. Majority of students who were unable to secure their place in State University were not able to meet the expense of programme fees in local NSHEIs recognized under the Universities Act. Further, many students are unable to follow their programmes in foreign university affiliated local colleges and foreign universities due to financial constraints. Therefore, taking into consideration MoE implemented IFSLS under the direction of budget proposals in 2017 which gives more opportunities to NSHEIs. Therefore, this proposed ECE degree programme has potential to enter to this IFSL scheme as this would be a MOE/UGC approved degree programme which gives an excellent opportunity to students.

A Problem statement

Premature years of a child's life are base to their lifetime development. Early childhood educators play a vital role in in these early years of child's life by providing the good healthiness and nourishment, a safe, protected and approachable environment and opportunities for early learning, which nurture children and prosper. However, "the quality of preschool education in Sri Lanka is a key challenge" [2]. Further, 59.9 per cent of 28, 449 teachers who work in preschools have passed the Advanced Level Examination. Nevertheless 83 per cent of teachers accomplished a professional training of one year or more, 9.5 per cent of present teachers do not possess any aforesaid qualification [2]. However, this indicated that more teachers need qualification in early childhood education. Currently only very few universities offer early childhood education. Preschool workforce education development and preschool teachers should be well qualified and they should focus on their continuous professional development, further facilitating the universities, higher education institutes, teacher education institutes and other training providers to design and offer programmes for the preschool education workforce at certificate, diploma, degree and post-graduate degree-level is important [2].

Hence in this background it is clear that teacher education in preschool or early childhood education in Sri Lanka need to be developed. Therefore, NSHEIs are also recognized the need for the teacher education in early childhood education. Though there are some diplomas offered by the institutes, there are lack of opportunities for ECE Degrees.

B Objective of the study

To investigate the need for the Bachelor of Education Early Childhood Education Degree programme at NSHEI in Sri Lanka.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objective of the study case study method adopted and quantitative measures have been complemented with the qualitative

measures. This study can be identified as a survey and in order to collect the data both primary and secondary data collection methods have used. Primarily data collection techniques are self-administered questionnaire for students who follows Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Diploma in Primary Teaching. The researcher conducted key informant interviews with some key stakeholders in the state universities namely head of the departments in Education Faculties. In addition, another three key informant interviews conducted with the three preschool owners in Colombo district. Secondary data will be used to collect more information. Secondary information is readily available information to use for the research. Secondary data namely relevant reports and documents in the NSHEIs, magazines, newspapers, articles, gazette, and minutes of meetings, internet and intranet can be taken as secondary data.

Area of the study is ABC as one of the Non-State Higher education institutes in Sri Lanka. Though there are twenty-four nonstate higher education institutes registered with the Ministry of Education only one institution has been considered for the study. Population of the study can be identified as hundred teacher trainees from Diploma in Early Childhood education and Diploma in Primary school teaching at ABC Campus. In order to achieve the research objectives simple random sample have been used to select the respondents. Out of hundred teacher trainees from Diploma in Early Childhood education and Diploma in Primary school teaching only seventy-five teacher trainees selected and self-administered google form questionnaires presented on online mode and emailed to them and they were given responsibility to return the questionnaire to the researcher within five days. The process involved distributing one to hundred numbers to all teacher trainees from Diploma in Early Childhood Education and primary school teaching. Writing one to hundred numbers in pieces of paper and folded, placed in a container and assorted together. Seventy-five numbers have chosen and that was included in the study. Hence over all seventy-five teacher trainees from Diploma in Early Childhood education and Diploma in Primary school teaching participated in this study. Questionnaire consists of five main

questions and both closed and open-ended questions on top. Objectives of the study and worth of the questionnaire have mentioned at the top of the questionnaire and guaranteed the confidentiality of the information collected.

A Data collection and response rate

According to the table 1 below it indicated that sixty-nine per cent was the questionnaire response rate and fifty-two questionnaires were returned out of seventy-five. Most research, objective of the researcher is to achieve approximately sixty percent (60%) response rate [7]. Therefore, sixty nine percent can be considered as good response rate.

TABLE 1
RESPONSE RATE

	Numbers	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires administered	75	75
Questionnaires returned	52	69
Not responded	23	21

Table 1: response rate

Source: Survey Data (2022)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analyzed by Excel software programme and interviews have been transcribed and coded. Further questionnaire comprises of both closed and open-ended questions. Open ended questions have arranged according to the thematic approach and analyzed.

A Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Age distribution of teacher trainees indicates out of 52 respondents sixty percent are in age range between 20 to 25 years old. Thirty percent of

teacher trainees are age range between 26 to 30 years of age and four percent, two percent and four percent are age ranges of 31 to 35, 36 to 40 and above 40 years of old respectively. It denotes that more respondents (sixty percent) are in age range between 20 to 25. Due to fast growth of primary school enrolments and higher rate of teacher attrition, age profile of teachers has become younger in many countries [8]. Thus the researcher argued that more teacher trainees are young and are in age range between 20 to 25 that they focus more on their studies and career. Therefore the institute (ABC institute) has good opportunity to commence the ECE programme. Further results indicated that majority of teacher trainees (ninety eight percent) are female while only two percent are mail students. Furthermore more teacher trainees (sixty nine percent) have Advanced Level (A/L) qualification and twenty six percent have additional diploma qualification and only five percent have degrees. Hence the researcher argued since more ECE and primary teacher trainees have only A/L qualification ABC institute has future demand for the proposed ECE Degree.

B Need Survey

According to the second part of the questionnaire ninety six percent students mentioned that they would like to follow and obtain a degree in Early Childhood Education while four percent are not in favour of proceeding with the same since, they have another degree (Graph 1). Hence it indicated majority of the teacher trainees (ninety six percent) would like to follow the ECE Degree.

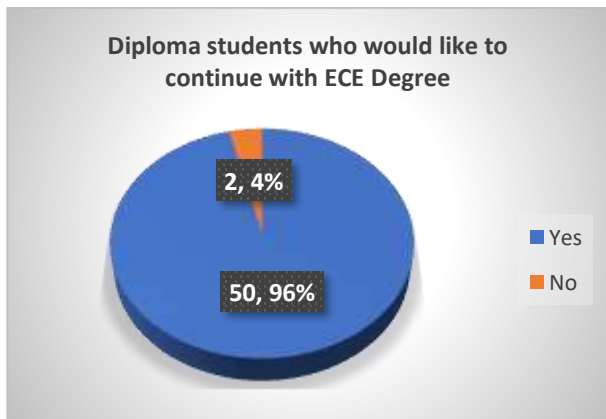


Fig. 1 Diploma students who would like to continue with ECE Degree in Graph 1

Source: Survey data (2022)

Question has directed to teacher trainees asking reasons for proceeding with the Early Childhood Education Degree. According to the responses, four themes were recognized viz gain more knowledge, migration purpose, career development and respondents like to work with children and teacher trainees believed fifteen percent, eight percent, seventy three percent and four percent respectively. Hence it indicated more respondents (seventy percent) would like to focus on their career and therefore it gives the opportunity to institute to commence on ECE programme (Graph 2).

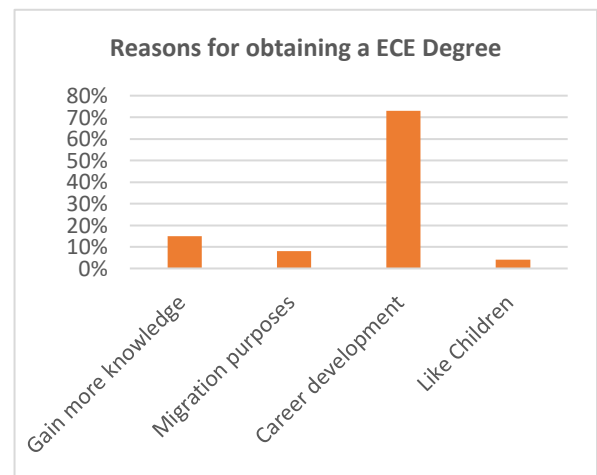


Fig.2 Reasons for obtaining a ECE Degree in Graph 2

Source: Survey data (2022)

Benefits of the Early Childhood education for the country is identified and analyzed under three themes namely students believe that Early Childhood Education (ECE) degree helps to develop knowledge attitude and skills, it's a foundation of education and this degree helps student to migrate to another country. Hence the fifteen percent respondents believed that ECE degree helps to gain knowledge attitude and skills, twenty three percent supposed the degree leads to migration purposes and sixty two percent believed that ECE degree is foundation of education and therefore more benefits to it (Graph 3). Hence it denotes that more respondents (sixty two percent) believed that ECE is vital since it is the foundation of education and therefore evidently it helps the country. Further, if the

institute commence ECE degree programme ninety percent of teacher trainees would like to join the programme while ten percent were not (Graph 4). Graph 4 results below indicated that ninety percent teacher trainees from Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Diploma in Primary Education would like to join the programme if the institute commence it. Thus, it implied that the ABC has reasons to commence the ECE degree programme since current students' responses are very promising.

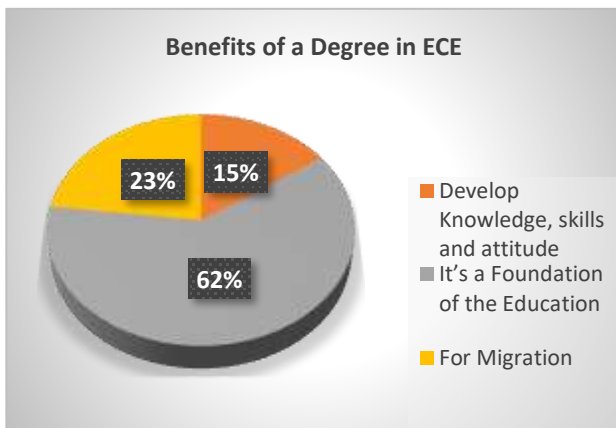


Fig. 3 Benefits of a Degree in ECE in Graph 3

Source: Survey data (2022)

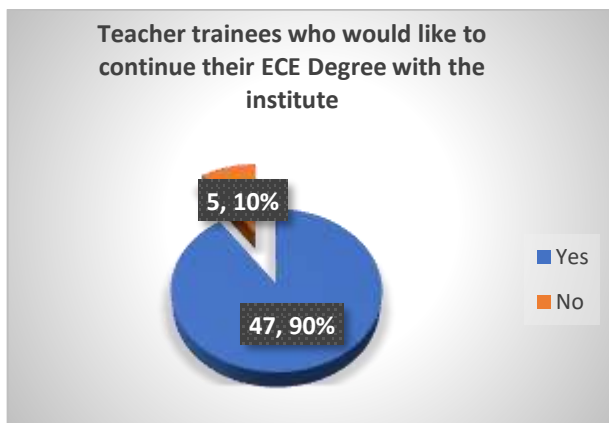


Fig. 4 Teacher trainees who would like to continue their ECE Degree with the institute in Graph 4

Source: Survey data (2022)

When interviewing the head of the department of Early Childhood Education in Faculty of Education in Open University of Sri Lanka, mentioned that it is very important to offer the ECE Degree since it the foundation or the basis of the education. Further, the head of the department mentioned that specifically no institute offer the government approved ECE Degree besides OUSL. Therefore, it is important that Higher Education Institutes focus on this area particularly ABC as a Non state higher education institute it is crucial to commence the ECE degree programme and contribute and add value to the education system in the country. As previous planned the researcher could not conduct the interview with one of the Deans in Education Faculties. The researcher contacted the Dean of the Faculty of Education in Certain state university, however due to busy schedule of the Dean, no interview was conducted and that could be identified as a limitation of the study. Further, when conducted the interviews with the three preschool owners, it is pointed out that importance of the ECE as base of the education as even play helps to develop the child's physically, mentally, and emotionally and teacher trainees are very keen to commence the degree programme as it helps to develop their careers. Furthermore, they mentioned that since the state university entry criteria can be rigid at times, they would like to have more flexible opportunities and entry criteria expect from NSHEIs.

CONCLUSION

ABC as a leading Non state higher education institute has identified the lacuna in offering the Degree programmes in the field of Early Childhood Education. In that context ABC has investigated the need for the Early Childhood Education degree. Seventy-five teacher trainees from the Diploma in Early Childhood education and Diploma in Primary Teaching participated in the study. Mainly it is quantitative study and to bring rich data and information study complemented with the qualitative data. This need survey has discussed the benefits of the ECE Degree to students and for the country. Further the researcher has interviewed the Head of the Department of Early Childhood Education in one

of the prominent state universities and emphasized that it is very crucial to commence the ECE programme since it provides opportunity to students due to capacity restraint and few programmes in state universities and moreover no private institute offer the programme. Furthermore, study highlighted that ninety six percent student like to start ECE Degree and if the institute commence the programme ninety percent student would like to join the programme. Therefore, study can be concluded that according to the results of the need survey it indicated ABC as a NSHEI there is a good potential and opportunity to proceed with the ECE Degree and contribute to the foundation of the education in the country which add value to the system on top.

DECLARATION

A. Study Limitation

Sine this need survey is a case study it limits the gaining information from other NSHEIs. Hence the study cannot be generalized among other NSHEIs in the country.

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