

PROGRAMME FOR THE CERTIFICATE IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

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SUMMARY OF CONTENT:

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) conducts a study programme for the award of the Certificate in Pre-school Education. It is of one-year duration. The main objective is to provide the student with required knowledge, skill, experience and orientation to become a qualified teacher of a pre-school or the manager of a day care centre (crèche). There are mothers and elderly family members who follow this programme for the sake of gaining know-how of bringing up their own children. This programme is very popular among a wide variety of students, varying according to age, sex, and entry level of education, employment and area of residence. There is evidence of its being useful and effective to a clientele varying from the mother / grand mother at home looking after the young child to the person seeking overseas employment as a professional pre-school teacher. It is also effective as an awareness-creating programme for any one interested in the healthy development of the young child. The content of the programme covers both theoretical knowledge and practical work, and students are given study material in print supplemented by A/V material and study support by means of contact sessions at regional / study centres.

Some of the unique features of the programme constitute firstly, the openness provided by means of minimum, flexible entry requirements in a country where there is high competition for entering University programmes; secondly, the ability to reach students in far off disadvantaged areas and thirdly, the provision of a recognised qualification for employment to persons who would otherwise have no such opportunity.

PROGRAMME FOR THE CERTIFICATE IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

BACKGROUND

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) commenced academic activities during the period 1980-81 with a few programmes of study which were already being conducted by other institutions like Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education (SLIDE), External Services Agency (ESA) of the University of Colombo and the Distance Education Unit of the Ministry of Education. The programme for the Certificate in Pre-school Education (C.Pr.Ed) is one of those programmes conducted by the ESA. The ESA is considered to be a non -formal education Organisation catering to further educational needs of persons with different educational backgrounds.

Teaching in this programme (C.Pr.Ed) was conducted during weekends on a face-to- face classroom basis. The methodology consisted of direct teaching, workshops and practical work in preparing teaching aids and teaching in pre-schools and project work in the form of preparation of a handbook on pre-school education. The administration of this programme (C.Pr.Ed) was handed over to the newly established Open University of Sri Lanka in 1981. Since 1981 up to date this programme of study has undergone many developmental changes with a view to transforming it into the distance teaching mode. Presently it is being conducted in the distance teaching mode.

AIMS of the programme of study (C.Pr.Ed)

This programme is designed and implemented to achieve the following aims:

1. provide education and initial practical experience to pre-school teachers,
2. educate the crèche managers and care takers of children in child care and development and expose them to practical experience.
3. Create parental awareness in early childhood care and education.

TARGET group

The major target group consists of pre-school teachers who have not received any formal professional education and training relevant to their profession. In this group there may be teachers who have had exposure to short term training courses.

Those who are looking forward to start a career as pre-school teachers are also included in the target group. Apart from teachers in pre-schools there are persons who are managers of child care centres / crèches with or without initial training. They too are considered to be in the target group. There are no restrictions to any others who wish to take up this programme of study. Opportunities are open to all those who have an interest in learning and updating their knowledge about young children. As such parents, adults and any others are able to enter this target group.

CURRICULUM Contents

The curriculum is organised under the following topics in two major areas.

a). THEORY courses

- 1 Child psychology
- 2 Principles of education
- 3 Development of language skills
- 4 Development of mathematical concepts
- 5 Development of manipulative skills
- 6 Exploration of the environment
- 7 Home and school relationships
- 8 Creative / Aesthetic activities
- 9 Organisation and management of pre-schools and crèches
- 10 Child health and nutrition
- 11 Integrative approach to teaching

b) PRACTICAL courses

- 12 Practical work in pre-schools (observation and teaching) and
Home based practical work

Practical work is an integral component in any teacher education programme. Accumulation of knowledge

by learning the theoretical contents alone will not in any way make a competent teacher. The teachers need to be able to put theory into classroom practice in dealing with young children and doing activities with them and also helping them in their problems and managing the total pre-school situation. Practical work consists of four components namely:

- 1 observation of pre-school class room sessions
2. Teaching in pre-schools
3. Making teaching aids at home and demonstrating how to use them in the presence of teaching staff
4. Preparation of a Hand Book for pre-school education. This is considered as a project to be completed within a given time

The above practical situations provide the students with first hand experience in the respective aspects of pre-school teaching and practical experience in dealing with young children.

DELIVERY mode and its characteristic features

As mentioned above this programme is delivered to students in the distance mode. The following are the major characteristic features of this mode as practised in Sri Lanka.

STUDY materials

Based on the curriculum given above study materials are produced mainly in the form of print material. A limited number of audio and video programmes are made available in the main library in Colombo and at Regional centres. These AV programmes are not built into the print material, but to be considered as additional / enrichment material. The first set of print materials is given to the students on the day of registration for the programme and subsequently they get the remaining sets. Students are expected to read the material before they attend the contact sessions, so that they could discuss any problems they came across and get help from the tutors to solve these problems.

CONTACT sessions

A limited number of contact sessions (10-12) are held at the regional / study centres, where the number of student attendance exceed 15. Where ever the number is less than 15, they are advised to attend the next nearest centre where the contact session is held. The contact session is known as “Day School”. The purpose of holding the Day School is to help the students with their problems.

In an indirect manner the Day School provides an opportunity for students to meet their teachers and co-students. The Sri Lankan students, especially those students who have not gone very far in higher levels of formal education feel the need of a teacher in their presence during formal learning situations. Those students in higher levels of education gradually get used to self-learning, and self-study in the absence of a teacher. It is often mentioned that they feel at ease to learn when the teacher is available in their presence. The vast majority of students in this programme have not gone beyond the 10th year in the school. Therefore the Day School provides an opportunity for them to feel the humanising effect of the teaching learning situation, and also to get away from the feeling of isolation and psychological aloofness that is created by the distance teaching mode. This is the only opportunity for students from far off places to come together and meet their peers and thus satisfy the need for social contact.

CREDIT rating and duration of the programme

The total curriculum content covers two credits. And the minimum duration of the programme is one academic year. One credit carries a total study time of 450 hours including the time spent for all coursework, practical work, attending day schools and answering assignments.

EVALUATION of student performance

Student performance is evaluated at two stages namely;

- 1 continuous assessment (formative)
- 2 final evaluation (summative)

For all theory courses continuous evaluation is done by way of take home assignments that are to be submitted according to a given schedule. These are evaluated and returned to the students with comments made by the tutor and the grade indicated on the assignment sheet. This continuous assessment procedure serves two purposes. One is the instructional purpose. The comments given by the tutor / examiner serves as feedback to the students to correct any mistakes and improve their knowledge. The other purpose is assessment of the progress made by the student. The student becomes aware of his/her achievement according to the grade marked on the assignment sheet.

A percentage of the marks obtained is added on to the final examination marks of the respective course.

FINAL award

The composite mark for all the courses calculated by adding 30% of the continuous mark to 70 % of the marks for the final examination in the respective courses determine the criteria for the final award. A student has to obtain pass marks in all the courses including practical work to be eligible for the award of the Certificate in Pre-school Education.

CONTRIBUTION towards empowerment through knowledge

NEED for empowerment

The mission of the combination of open and distance education is to allow maximum possible openness in providing educational opportunities to those sections of the community who have an expressed need for education, and specially to those who would not under restricted and closed conditions be able to benefit from the normal educational provision. The situation in Sri Lanka is such that there is high competition for entry into higher and specialised levels of formal education. Economic factors as well as other factors like urban rural differences, distance from educational institutions, entry requirement to programmes of study and unavailability of required educational training programmes in recognised institutions cause constraints and restrictions to obtaining educational opportunities. These factors cause barriers to empowerment in knowledge and education to different sections of the Sri Lankan community.

The vast majority of the school going population leaves school at G.C.E. O/L or earlier, due to one or more of the above factors. In an era of “bursting of knowledge” almost every second of our day to day life, each and every member of the community has the common need for learning and advancement in knowledge. Presently an observable trend in the Sri Lankan community is the orientation of the younger population towards job training,. According to latest available data, out of the unemployed population, 23.5% males and 24.3% females have successfully completed the G.C.E O/L Examination¹.

There is also a pressing need felt by parents to educate their children. They feel the need to provide the best available facility within their reach to educate the children from the pre-school level onwards. But pre-school education is not provided by the state. It is not organised at the national level. As a result a wide variety of institutions, organisations and private individuals run pre-schools. These pre-schools are located in different parts of the island and mostly in urban areas. There is a dearth of professionally trained teachers to teach in these pre-schools. In a recent study by (Talagala. IMM. 1992)² it was found that there is only one government institution that carries out pre-school teacher training. Although the study is limited to two districts in the country which happen to be the most urbanised and privileged areas this finding is valid at the national level too. This institution is no other than The Open University itself. The Open University compared to other providing institutions has an unbroken record of running this programme continuously since its inception in 1980-81 This is one other factor to the credit of the Open University. According to the above mentioned source¹ there are seven recognised private institutions that run teacher training programmes and these too are located in the cities. Those from far off places are not in a position to benefit from them. The other disadvantage is that some of these conduct courses in the English medium only. Those who need it in the local languages are at a disadvantage. There are a multitude of mushroom institutions / organisations conducting pre-school teacher training courses of different duration ranging for 2 week to 6 months. These are not widely recognised but persons from far off rural areas specially those from low income groups gain some rudimentary knowledge from these short courses.

Parents and family elders feel a pressing need to update their knowledge in bringing up young children and providing an appropriate environment at home for their healthy growth and development. (Wijeratne W.A.R. 1997)³. The OUSL is playing a major role in disseminating knowledge about educating young children by offering this programme to a varied population.

STUDENT profile

The clientele of this programme is varied and widely spread in different parts of the island. The majority of them are either teachers in pre-schools or those who look forward to start a career in teaching in pre-schools or managing a day care centre. Some of them look forward to finding employment overseas in the same field. The remaining section of the clientele consists of parents, family elders, and primary school teachers. The age of the client group range from 18 years to about 60 in rare cases, but the majority are between 18 and 30 years of age. The vast majority of them are females. There have been instances of a few male students, and also priests and nuns (both Buddhist and Christian) following this programme of study. Among family elders there have been instances of grand parents too following this programme of study for the sake of being better informed in how to

bring up and educate young children. Unemployed mothers find a useful source of knowledge in this programme to bring up their children and educate them in the proper way. Although the latter mentioned categories of students are not regular features in the clientele this situation characterises the need for knowledge felt by different sections of the community.

OPENNESS and distance mode

Such a heterogeneous group of students as mentioned above are drawn towards this programme mainly due to two factors namely the openness and the distance mode of delivery. The openness and flexibility at the entry point is a great relief for students who due to some reason or other have not been able to get higher qualifications in formal education which lead to employment. The only entry requirement asked for in this programme is a pass in the G.C.E. O/L examination with language and mathematics. At the initial years this requirement too was not called for. But later it was found that without a basic knowledge of these two subjects a person would not be able to function successfully as a teacher. On the other hand there are two courses in the programme which directly require competency in these subjects. This was an opportunity for students to enter a University study programme with a minimum qualification.

The distance mode cut off all barriers caused by the distance from home to the providing institution. This was a relief from time and money spent on daily travelling from far off places. Those who were already employed in pre-schools and those - especially mothers who could not leave their house hold and young children benefited very much by this study mode. They were required to attend the practical sessions only because these were compulsory.

The curriculum contents too cater to the needs of the above clientele. The courses in child psychology and principles of education provide the students with knowledge of the nature of the young child and how to facilitate their learning and development. The course in health & nutrition helps parents and teachers to be better informed of ways and means of promoting their healthy development. The courses on developmental aspects of language, manipulate skills and, creative / aesthetic activities of young children provide a rich source of information which they may not obtain elsewhere in that synthesised form. The appropriate activities too are suggested and practical experience too is provided. They learn the need for maintaining healthy parent- teacher relationships. Teaching skills and basics of management skills are provided in this programme. Thus the contents and methodology of the curriculum provides the takers of these courses comprehensive knowledge of pre-school education as well as parenting and dealing with young children.

Educating the young child is a collective responsibility of the community. Parents and the average adult have reached different levels of education in different subject areas and they also claim to be educated citizens. But all of them irrespective of their high/low qualifications in formal education need this knowledge as parents, teachers and care-takers of young children. Therefore this programme of study justifies its role as an agent of empowerment through knowledge specially in the area of educating and bringing up young children.

HUMAN resources development

This programme of study opens up avenues of employment to those school leavers who look forward to a professional qualification. As it is the only pre- school education programme administered by a university this programme has a special recognition with in the country as well as overseas. Many of the students who successfully complete this programme in the English medium go for overseas employment as nursery teachers. This qualification helps the clients to be self-employed by setting up their own pre schools in their own locality.

CONSTRAINTS

There are a number of constraints in making the best out of this programme. The number of study centres where the programme is active are limited due to resource constraints such as shortage of tutors to serve at those centres specially for the practical work which is a compulsory component of the curriculum. As such there has been instances when the OUSL could not respond to the needs of all those who request the opportunity. Sufficient use of AV media to compensate for the mentioned resource constraints too was not available due to the same circumstances. Within such constraints this programme has been successful in producing an average of over 200 qualified persons per year (refer table 1).

Table 1 STATISTICS OF THE PROGRAMME (C.Pr.Ed)		
Academic Year	Number Enrolled	No. of Passes
1991 – 92	354	179
1992 – 93	599	252
1993 – 94	937	410
1994 – 95	1012	386
1995 – 96	382	234
1997 – 98	475	Results not yet released
1998 -- 99	570	Just started

This is a satisfactory achievement when compared with the enrolment in a distance teaching programme where entry requirements are minimal. A lower rate of success is indicated only in one instance (1994-95).

This programme of study was selected for a case study because of the characteristic features of open / distance education in its implementation and also because of the common features in aspects of human resource development, training, and non-formal / community education embedded in it.

References

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