

Professional Training for Beginning Directors of Early Childhood Education Programs in Taiwan

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Abstract

This chapter proposes that the training requirements for beginning directors of early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs in Taiwan be established in accordance with the Early Childhood Education and Care Act of 2011. Questionnaires and focus group interviews were used to collect data from 979 participants working in ECEC, including centre directors, government administrators, and teacher educators. The five main findings arising from this study were: 1) Training programs should include 7 categories comprising Legal aspects of preschool education and child welfare, Program administration, Curriculum leading, Personnel management, Financial and document management, Safety and health, and School-community communication. 2) A supervision mechanism by the government should be established to ensure the quality of training; 3) Teachers and directors agree that 180 training hours evenly distributed over a six-month period as the minimum hours for preparing an experienced teacher to serve as a first-year director; 4) The pedagogical design of the programs should include hands-on experience, case studies, and learning from outstanding ECEC models; and 5) Instructors should be able to integrate theory and practice of ECEC. Finally, three recommendations were made for designing effective training programs for prospective directors of ECEC in Taiwan.

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幼兒園新手園長專業培訓方案

本章針對台灣 2011 年制定的幼兒教育及照顧法中欲取得幼兒園園長資格之專業培訓課程提供方案建議。本研究重點在園長專業培訓課程之關鍵核心如課程結構內容、課程形式、以及授課師資等項目之探究，結果將供未來開課單位實施之參考。研究過程包含專家諮詢和問卷調查兩種方式，以全國與幼兒教育和保育相關的行政人員、師培機構人員、幼兒園園長及老師作為研究對象，調查其意見。共有 69 人參與諮詢討論以及共發放 979 份問卷。

研究結果共有五點，一、園長培訓的課程架構分為七個領域，包涵：學前教保政策及法令、園務行政專題與實務、教育與保育專題實務、人事管理專題與實務、文書及財物管理與實務、健康安全與危機處理、幼兒園與家庭互動專題與實務。二、為確保課程之品質，政府應審查培訓單位並訂定成果標準。三、受訪者同意課程時數至少需 180 小時才夠培養基本能力並於半年內分散式授課完成。四、授課形式須以學員實作為主並運用實際案例與觀摩優質幼兒園進行學習。五、園長培訓之授課師資應分為兩類，理論與實務須兼具。基於以上結論，本研究將對教育部、師培機構、及縣市政府提供三點建議。

Tiivistelmä

Tässä artikkelissa esitetään, että aloittelevien varhaiskasvatuksen johtajien koulutusvaatimukset Taiwanissa pitäisi määrittää lakiperusteisesti. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin kyselyillä ja kohderyhmähaastatteluilla. Tutkimukseen osallistui 979 varhaiskasvatuksen työntekijää, johtajia, valtionhallinnon virkamiehiä ja opettajien kouluttajia. Viisi tärkeintä tutkimustulosta tässä tutkimuksessa ovat: 1) Koulutusohjelmien pitäisi sisältää 7 kategoriaa: Juridiset näkökulmat esiopetukseen ja lasten hyvinvointiin, ohjelman hallinta, opetussuunnitelmajohtaminen, henkilöstöjohtaminen, taloudellinen- ja asiakirjahallinta, turvallisuus ja terveys sekä kouluyhteisön kommunikaatio; 2) Pitäisi kehittää hallituksen ohjausmekanismi koulutuksen laadun varmistamiseksi; 3) Opettajien ja johtajien tulisi päätyä yhteisymmärrykseen 180 tunnin koulutuksen jakautumisesta tasaisesti kuuden kuukauden jaksolle minimivaatimuksena kokeneen opettajan valmentamisena johtajan työhön ensimmäisen työvuotensa aikana; 4) Ohjelman pedagogiseen sisältöön tulisi sisällyttää käytännön kokemusta, tapaustutkimusta ja tutustumista onnistuneisiin varhaiskasvatuksen malleihin; ja 5) Ohjaajan pitäisi yhdistää koulutuksessa varhaiskasvatuksen teoria ja käytäntö. Artikkelissa esitetään lopulta kolme suositusta varhaiskasvatuksen johtajien koulutusohjelmien toteutukseen Taiwanissa.

Introduction

The year 2011 leads the field of Taiwan's early childhood education and care (ECEC) to a new era because of the passage of the Early Childhood Education and Care Act (hereafter referred to as the "ECEC Act"). It requires the traditional kindergartens serving 4–6 year olds and traditional nursery schools serving 0–6 year olds to change by becoming preschools serving 2–6 year olds. The change has brought about an integration of education and care provided by ECEC centres serving young children and their families. According to Article 19 of ECEC Act, prospective directors of preschools not only must have at least five years of experience as a certified teacher or assistant teacher, but also need to complete a director's professional training program. Moreover, the ECEC Act stipulates that each training program must be administered and supervised by either the local government or an institute of higher education with a department of early childhood education or child welfare.

In 1997 educational authorities in the USA began to actively promoting the standardisation of professional qualifications required by directors of ECEC programs (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Culkin, 2000). By contrast, until very recently many preschool directors in Taiwan have lacked sufficient management and leadership training. According to the Ministry of Education (2011), at present there are a total of 6,984 preschools in Taiwan. In line with the great importance given to education in traditional Taiwanese culture, in 1994 the law on teacher qualifications, deemed that a bachelor degree be the minimum qualification for teachers working with children aged four to six years. From this time onwards trainers and researchers of ECEC focuses remained on the teaching qualities of teachers, and little attention was paid to the preschool's directors, despite the research finding that the director has a major influence on the school's learning environment and overall quality (Hsue, 2004; Morgan, 2000). With the passage of the ECEC Act, preschool directors are now required to receive specified professional training, including leadership and management skills, and this has led to the creation of new investments of improving the overall quality of preschool education as the OECD suggested to the members of United nations (OECD, 2011).

Literature review

According to Hsue (2004) and Liao and Bao (2002), there were four main ways in which ECEC directors could acquire administrative skills: 1) learning by doing; 2) guidance from an experienced director or administrator; 3) visiting model preschools; and 4) taking short-time training workshop. The arrangements of existing training workshops for ECEC directors consisted mainly of lectures, peer discussions, and few field visits (Taipei City Government, Bureau of Social Affairs, 2005; Taipei City Government, Bureau of Education, 2009). It has been pointed out that case studies, curriculum reform plans, and action research are all effective ways to support participants in such courses better integrate theory and practice (Bloom & Bella, 2005). Moreover, Hsu (2005) studied Taiwanese teachers' perspectives on learning and suggested that in-service training should include a balance of theory and practice; such as learning through observation; simulations; problem solving; interactive learning; group discussion; practical training; and apprenticeship.

In a questionnaire-based study, Hsu (2005) found that Taiwanese preschool teachers and directors held similar views. They had the same preference list as to choose the instructor for training directors. These were, in descending order of preference: highly experienced preschools directors, specialists in ECEC relating fields, educational administrators, and university professors. These findings suggest that those participating in a training program for directors were most inclined to learn from instructors who could make use of lots of practical experiences, since instruction provided by such teachers was akin to on-the-job training.

Moreover, participants indicated that director training should centre on the actual duties and skills required by the position, and the content of training had been addressed in a number of studies (Hsue, 2005; Liao & Cheng, 2008). A composite summary of these studies reveals that the work of an ECEC centre director consisted of seven broad categories: program administration; financial management; personnel management; safety and health; curriculum leading; parent-teacher communication; and professional development. To be sure, the responsibilities of an ECEC centre director as defined in the ECEC Act of 2011 will bring changes inside these seven categories, and this is something which needs further study.

Nonetheless, it remains to be seen to the extent to which the future professional training programs will succeed in equipping directors with the skills required due to the increasingly important role they were expected to play in the educational system. Thus the purpose of the present study was to determine the most suitable type of training programs, with special attention given to the key areas of structure, content, and instructors. It is anticipated that the results of this study will provide useful research-based evidence for those in charge of establishing director training courses in the future.

Research methodology and data analysis

Data was collected using two methods comprising focus groups and a survey questionnaire. In order to include a wide variety of perspectives, six focus groups were conducted in the north, centre, and south of Taiwan with a total of 69 participants. Participants of these focus groups consisted of educators from the departments of ECE or child welfare programs at colleges and universities; specialists in the administration of childhood education programs; highly experienced kindergarten directors; and the head administrators of the education departments of various city and county governments. The focus group discussions centred on the program's goals, structure, content, and length of training.

Subsequently, a questionnaire was formulated based on the information obtained in the focus groups, with several rounds of revision carried out to incorporate the suggestions provided in group consultations with specialists in ECE and child welfare. Stratified sampling was carried out on the data collected from the responses provided by the head administrators of city and county departments of education, ECEC centre directors and workers, and educators at university departments of ECE. A total of 979 questionnaires were sent out, and of these 84 percent ($n=809$) were completed and returned.

The data thus collected was analyzed using frequency distribution, means, and percentages, thereby providing insight into the participants' background variables, degree of approval concerning the "Training Course for ECEC Centre Directors," and their overall views concerning the course. A Chi-square test (χ^2) was used to test for any significant differences between

the participants' background variables and their degree of approval as to the structure, content, and length of the course.

Main results

There were no significant difference in the data collected between the various stakeholder groups that participated in the study. Based on the analysis of data collected through the focus group discussions and the completion of questionnaires, this section presents the five main results:

- 1) The training course for prospective directors should consist of 7 categories and 44 topics and these should be delivered over 180 hours evenly distributed over a six month period (See Table 1)

Table 1. Recommended topics for inclusion in a training program for ECEC directors

| Category | Class hours | Topics |
|--|-------------|--|
| Legal aspects of preschool education and child welfare | 18 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preschool and child welfare policy 2. The Early Childhood Education and Care Act 3. Laws and regulations related to child welfare 4. Gender equality legislation (the Gender Equity Education Act, the Sexual Assault Prevention Act, and the Sexual Harassment Prevention Act, etc.) 5. Special topics (safeguarding personal information, human rights, etc.) |
| Program administration | 36 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Director's role and duties 2. Making preschool development policies 3. Formulating and implementing measures for staff supervision & evaluation, etc. 4. Planning and holding meetings 5. Design for Learning environment and facility management 6. Marketing concepts and strategies 7. Administration and management with computer 8. Professional ethics |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|----|--|
| Curriculum leading | 36 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Laws related to curriculum planning 2. Curriculum planning and implementation 3. Establishing learning communities 4. Staff meetings and class supervision 5. Individual child guidance 6. Appraising and making arrangements for children with special needs |
| Personnel management | 18 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Laws and regulations related to Teacher's Act 2. Legal rights and interests of auxiliary staff 3. Leadership skills and strategies 4. Communication skills and conflict resolution 5. Morale and time management |
| Financial and document management | 18 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating, handling, and filing official documents 2. Planning budget and operating costs 3. Accounting and purchasing 4. School property management |
| Safety and health | 36 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning and implementing safety program 2. Safety management 3. Responding to accidents and emergencies 4. Crisis prevention and management 5. Health measures, education, and services 6. Food management (hygiene and kitchen safety) 7. General sanitation 8. Prevention of contagious and non-contagious illnesses 9. Safe use of medicines 10. Personal safety education 11. Dealing with exceptional issues such as sexual assault, domestic violence, and family problems |
| School-community communication | 18 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicating with parents 2. Planning school-parent program, and parenting workshop for diversified family 3. Minority services 4. Searching social resources 5. Making community networking |

The contents of Table 1 showed that the consensus on beginning director's training topics among ECE teacher educators, administrators, and practitioners were all focused on the skills of planning and dealing with a director's work. The seven categories of training courses are different to what are expected of a preschool teacher's training in Taiwan. Pre-service teachers of ECEC need to accomplish four categories of courses including educational theories, pedagogies, basics of teaching, and field practices (Ministry of Education, 2003). In comparison with what is included in previous teacher training, the courses for directors help a teacher changing

the roles of teaching and caring to a manager of a school by doing to learn. The majority of the topics such as marketing, budgeting, accounting, kitchen safety, morale and making various school policies were totally new to teachers who would stay the most time in his or her classroom with young children. Only a few topics such as child guidance, curriculum planning and communicating with parents build on what would have learnt when training to become a preschool teacher.

These findings are in agreement with the study by Catron and Groves (1999). They found that moving from the position of a preschool teacher to that of a director requires a shift in focus from the individual classroom to the entire school, including working with all the teachers and parents, as well as the wider community and education system as a whole. In other words, because the director was responsible for all the affairs of the school, in addition to the basic knowledge prerequisite to serving as a teacher, he or she must also be competent in school administration and management.

2) Teaching methods should be designed according to the practical needs of the prospective director and include an adequate variety of ECEC case studies

Research has shown that what new directors lack the most was practical experience (Bloom, 1989). Thus it is important for training programs to introduce trainees to appropriate information and documents they need to be familiar with, without which it will take them more time to learn about the roles and responsibilities of their new position.

This finding matched the work by Bloom and Bella (2005), who implemented a training course for preschool directors. It was found that such programs needed to centre on those areas that the trainees have the most difficulty with. Moreover, such courses should also include in-depth discussions of a variety of case studies so as to provide trainees with adequate problem-solving skills. Similarly, since both teachers and directors have to deal with complex and ambiguous situations as a regular part of their work, it has been suggested that case studies were a highly beneficial aspect in the training of education professionals (Kau, 2000). Moreover, in a study by Hsue and Wu (2007) it was found that administrative personnel at preschools agreed that in addition to teaching experience, directors' professional growth was also facilitated by their participation in such activities as small group discussions, consultation with specialists, and field trips to other

schools along with colleagues. Thus it is clear that a director must be able to handle a wide variety of responsibilities, and that collaborative learning and case studies are effective approaches to acquiring and enhancing the knowledge and skills they require to perform their duties.

3) The training course should be delivered over a minimum period of six-months, with a total of 180 training hours evenly distributed after work time

Similar to previous research which found that the most pressing need of a new director was to smoothly deal with the work at hand (Catron & Groves, 1999) and study findings underscored the need of systematic, intensive, and relevant training focused on the unique needs of early childhood directors (Bella & Bloom, 2003), participants in the present study agreed that a training course should consist of a minimum of 180 hours of class time evenly distributed over a six-month period, so as to meet the trainees' requirements with better management of work, family, and education (Bloom, Vinci, Rafanello, & Donohue, 2011). Such arrangement can also enable trainees to gain new information, try it out in their work, and then discuss in class any questions or problems which arise.

4) The training programs must ensure a sound integration of theory and practice on EC leadership

There was general agreement among the respondents that the training course should be taught by two different kinds of instructors: educators at university or college departments of ECE or child welfare; and outstanding preschool directors along with at least a ECE master's degree. The reasoning for the inclusion of an experienced director was threefold:

- An acting director with extensive experience of the relationship between theory and practice was in a good position to provide lots of practical material for case studies;
- The concrete situations provided by such case studies were conducive to decision-making modeling and effective learning; and
- An instructor with at least a master's degree would be able to present the material in a systematic manner, provide pertinent guidance and feedback on the students' reports, and convey the essential information within the allotted amount of time.

There was also agreement among the participants in this research that the training course would be more effective if the class size is limited to 50 trainees. This was based on the belief that smaller group sizes could enable better interaction, group discussion, and effective engagement in learning.

5) Government supervision is needed

The participants in the focus groups were in agreement that a supervision mechanism should be established to ensure the quality of the training program. There was also general agreement that certification for completing the course should be based on more than merely a satisfactory rate of attendance. For this purpose, the university offering the course or the local government should set up a committee to determine the minimal requirements for certification. The research participants had offered suggestions such as portfolio evaluation, oral presentation on a certain leadership topic, and written exam on ECEC Act and regulations.

Recommendations and challenges

There is a need for early childhood centres to respond to the changing social context and national policies in Taiwan – to the far greater diversity in families, younger children entering centres, children and families in need of social support, and expectations of working parents. The traditional teacher training which more focused on the school learning has responded insufficiently with the new ECEC Act implementation. Directors will be required to play an enhanced role in leading all staff to transform their roles of integrating the care, upbringing, and education to meet the legal requirements. The findings of this study suggested an expected profile of the director's training program. However, as the training programs will start up soon and widely spread all over the country to meet requirements of laws, several challenges arises, for which program instructors' availabilities and qualities are critical for the effectiveness of the program. Three recommendations thus were made to the policy makers, government administrators, and teacher educators as the followings.

A. Establish a registered system for director's training instructors

Because the purpose of the training program is to provide trainees with the knowledge and skills they will require to serve as effective directors, the course needs to include both theory and practice. Since such courses have not been offered before, neither at colleges or universities level, nor as a form of internship, the first step is to give full consideration to the availability of a sufficient number of qualified instructors who meet the requirements of being registered EC director trainers with local government bodies. In order to be approved as a qualified instructor, he or she must have a masters degree in EC and worked in the sector for three more years. If he or she worked as a director in a national or local government accredited outstanding centre more than three years or involved in the central government mentor program will waive the degree requirement.

B. Training university instructors or teacher educators to teach courses for preschool directors

If trainees are to learn what they need to know within the time allotted for completing the program, the instructors must have a comprehensive understanding of the topics they teach, and in most cases this will require that they make preschool administration one of their areas of specialization. For example, in conducting a course on time management, the instructor needs to integrate the theory of time management with the actual situations for a centre director who requires many time management skills. Moreover, he or she needs to demonstrate how this is done in preschool daily situations.

C. Evaluating the effectiveness of the programs

In response to the requirements of the ECEC Act, these training programs for preschool directors are set to open throughout Taiwan from the new semester on 2013. It is necessary that they all meet uniform standards of quality. Thus it is essential that the relevant authorities establish suitable quality control measures, including vetting the qualifications of the instructors, or participant's outcomes and undertaking research to evaluate the qualities of the programs. At the same time, it will also be essential to carry out follow-up research to determine which training models are most effective in training future preschool directors.

The enactment of 2011 ECEC Act in Taiwan was expected to improve the overall quality of preschool education. The director's critical roles of leadership and management have an important share of the policy. Since the professional training of beginning directors is built upon the 5-year practical teaching experiences and child development knowledge of a certified teacher, the study findings proposed essential information of the training program, including contents, instructors, pedagogies, structure and program supervision mechanism. Moreover, recommendations were made to meet the challenges of possible lack of qualified instructors and challenges of program standards and evaluations in the future.

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