



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2020; 6(2): 32-36
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 11-11-2019
Accepted: 16-12-2019

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Analysis of early childhood care and development policy in Myanmar

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Abstract

The major purpose of this study is to analyse Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) policy in Myanmar which is mainly for child and family development. Myanmar ECCD policy has been shaped according to consultation, identification of major needs and challenges priority objectives, consideration of recommendations and taking into account the results of workshops, interviews. So, this can be said as really decentralized policy. It is found that Myanmar ECCD emphasizes more care and development for humanistic values such as happiness, balance emotion, freedom, equity and dignity than other pragmatic and behavioristic values. The major aim is found firstly for the contribution to their families, communities where they live and lastly to the nation. Objectives in Myanmar emphasize mostly on early stage of childhood (2-3year) and most objectives focus on this stage for care and development, but detail plans can be seen in preschool education system as mentioned above. Moreover, this policy has target groups and indicators for future target, appropriate method and strategy to implement successfully. However, it is really important to evaluate annually or in an appropriate duration according to the needs, structural and cyclical situations of the local context.

Keywords: Early childhood care and development, values, policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Definitions and Purpose of ECCD Policy

There are various definitions which refer to Early Childhood Education and Care based on the traditions, values and understanding in accordance with the requirements and needs of the particular context for the current and future challenges and concerns. These definitions vary from early childhood care and education (ECCE), early childhood education (ECE), early childhood education and care (ECEC), early childhood care and development (ECCD), to early childhood development (ECD). So, the name in each context reflects what they value and assume as priority for example: they emphasis on education or care or development or both or link to other sectors like health, social and policy (Pearson & Sim, 2016) ^[12]. And there is no best early childhood provision model which can be followed by all countries in the world to result in the best practices, but it would be better if each country learns experiences and reflects in their own practice which is the most appropriate with their local and international resources and needs (UNESCO, 2007) ^[18].

Early Childhood care and education (ECCE) policy is a diverse and complex area for different nations but the same theme is not only for childcare and early education, but for their health, social and emotional welfare, nutrition, basic rights, pregnant and women's employment and equity and equality, as well as quality and finally for the poverty concerns (Kaga, Bennett & Moss, 2010) ^[5]. In addition, if the children have good start in their life, they can possess sound foundation for future development, education, health and well-being both in early years and throughout life (Elliot, 2006) ^[4]. Furthermore, according to OECD (2014c) ^[8], children who had access to early childhood education can perform better in their academic performance in their later life. So, early childhood is the paramount importance for children and for the development of the nation.

1.2 Quality ECCD

Quality ECCE can be best achieved only if all the sectors such as health, nutrition, social protection, and education are cooperating together for the aim of quality early childhood (Raikes, Devercelli & Kutaka, 2015) ^[14]. Moreover, it is necessary to emphasis on providing

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early childhood education even though more trained teachers, enough resources and funding are not fully available, the role of policies, regulations which can influence program options and their delivery are not well working (Raikes, Devercelli & Kutaka, 2015) ^[14]. So, it is very important to have access early childhood care and education to all children whether they are living in developing countries or developed countries. The most important thing is to make sure that the programs and services offered can fulfil the needs of children and their families in accordance with the culture and special requirements of the individuals.

1.3 Describing Background Information in Myanmar

Firstly, it is important to describe the background information in Myanmar, the largest country in Southeast Asia, which has a total land area of 676,578 square kilometers. Concerned with administration, Myanmar has 14 Regions/States, 70 districts, 330 townships, 84 sub-townships, 3,063 wards, 13,618 village tracts and 64,134 villages. Because of "three mountain ranges, three river systems and frequent monsoons, there is a complex geography and many environmental challenges, making communications, transportation, rural development and national economic growth most difficult. However, Myanmar has an abundance of natural resources" (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014 p-34) ^[16]. According to this information of Myanmar, it is very important to take into account these kinds of demographic differences in order to have access to ECCD programs regardless of their environment, difficult or easy access to transportation to have equity and equality, available resources which can be applied in particular context, and finally for the effective implementation throughout the country.

1.4 Purpose of Early Childhood Care and Development Policy in Myanmar

The major purpose of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is mainly for child and family development. The Government of Myanmar places high priority on the development, education, health, nutrition and protection of young children, from conception to eight years of age. As a result of expanded investment in ECCD, Myanmar will benefit from lower costs for health and nutrition care, welfare and protection services (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014) ^[16].

This purpose may come from the data reported by Win (2015) ^[20] who found that, Myanmar, one of the developing countries in South East Asia, is also one of the countries where the percentage of worlds' malnourished children is 80% in these countries and children who suffer malnourished between the stage of conception and up to 2 years can cause impaired physical and mental development which can influence the productivity and development of the country. Moreover, almost all child deaths in Myanmar are closely related to micronutrient deficiency because of lack of iodine, vitamin A and iron (Black *et al.*, 2008) ^[3]. So, the government and policy makers in Myanmar are very concerned with this and they decide to develop this comprehensive policy for the sake of the children and nation. All plans and practices which focused on these kinds of concerns can be found in the policy.

Moreover, it is found that Myanmar ECCD policy is trying to have culturally and linguistically appropriate ECCD services to achieve peaceful relations among ethnic groups, and will enable children from all ethnic groups to succeed in school (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014) ^[16]. So, there should be no disparities between rural and urban areas and any groups because children in rural and remote are vulnerable and it is important to have access to these services because it was found that in Asia, approximately 61 % of young children do not have access to ECD programs (OMEP, Istanbul Declaration, 2013) ^[9].

2. Analysis of ECCD Policy in Myanmar

2.1 Analysing Vision against International Standard

Vision of ECCD in Myanmar is "from birth to 8 years of age, all children of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar will receive holistic, high-quality and developmentally-appropriate care from their parents, caregivers and service providers to ensure they will be happy, healthy, well nourished, socially adept, emotionally balanced and well protected in conditions of freedom, equity and dignity in order to contribute positively to their families, communities and the nation" (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014 p-69) ^[16].

When we analyze it, it is found that Myanmar ECCD emphasizes more care and development for humanistic values such as happiness, balance emotion, freedom, equity and dignity than other pragmatic and behavioristic values and the major aim is firstly for the contribution to their families, communities where they live and lastly to the nation.

Similarly, this vision is in accordance with Pampanini (2013) ^[11], who says that humanistic approach is the best approach for the development of education system rather than just utilizing the pursuit of education. So, it is one important thing to consider when delivering education to students not only numeracy and literacy, but more essentially "human rights, democratic citizenship, and learning to live together (Pampanini, 2013) ^[11] and the foremost important in education process is the humanistic mission. Thus, it can be concluded that Myanmar ECCD policy is more humanistic and this can be noticed in the name of policy which focus on care rather than development and education.

Analyzing Mission against International Standard

The first mission which uses multisectoral coordination in Myanmar ECCD policy can also be seen in UNESCO report by Kaga, Bennett & Moss (2010) ^[5], which found that coordination within or outside line ministries can generate positive results like increase awareness of ECCE by public and widely use of comprehensive services. As regards the ECCD services which are provided equitably, there should be equitable approaches particularly for marginalized and the vulnerable children from poor families which focus on inclusive approaches to protect social and emotional issues for targeted children and children with special needs to make sure that they have access to education and care equally and equitably (Kaga, Bennett & Moss, 2010) ^[5].

So, it can be analysed that Myanmar ECCD policy meets these kinds of criteria and it would be able to produce the positive and valuable results for all children in Myanmar regardless of the social economic statics, gender, location and culture and ethnic groups. Moreover, this kind of

focusing children in most marginalized and vulnerable communities can make ensure the child rights and also results in reducing disparities (Pearson & Sim, 2016) ^[12]. Furthermore, giving high quality early childhood education especially for disadvantaged students from lower socioeconomic status make sure students have the strong education careers throughout their life (Lee, *et al.*, 2014) ^[7].

The next mission, relating to the offering parental education, early care and development, it is in line with the neuroscience and research on brain development, described by Engle, *et al.* (2007) which reported that approximately 200 millions of children aged 5, which is the first part of life, cannot access their full potential because of poor health and nutrition. In addition, according to Rolnick & Grunewald (2007, in Pearson & Sim, 2016) ^[12], it was found that early childhood programmes implemented in 1990 for disadvantaged children are yielding positive effects on long-term outcomes and changes in life for youths and adults. Furthermore, there is an evidence from research which shows that intensive, quality interventions on early childhood can affect directly and persistently on cognitive and non-cognitive development (Barnett, 2002: Temple & Reynolds, 2007) ^[17].

All these findings highlight that integrated and multisectoral ECCD services is crucial for the holistic development of children and so, it can be analysed that the mission for implementing Myanmar ECCD can produce balanced development in children perceptually, socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically.

Another mission which focuses on development and education; preschool services, kindergarten, primary education, compulsory and inclusive activities and which will feature active learning methods and child-centred and developmentally appropriate approaches are sound and suitable intervention for ECCD. This method can concisely with the child perspective paradigm, which is built on an interpretative psychological approach combining early care and early education in a child-centred approach (Sommer, Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2013) ^[15]. Moreover, the rationale based on UN Convention on the right of Child (1989), introduced the implications to give young children “a voice, having responsibilities, listening to them, and trusting them as a competent individual” (Sommer, Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2013) ^[15] and the rights of child to be heard, seen and included clearly shows child oriented focus, by giving opportunities to children concern themselves with no much theorising.

Furthermore, this mission is in accordance with the five basic assumptions for child perspective-oriented approach by Sommer, Samuelsson & Hundeide (2013) ^[15], which includes

- i. “Seeing the child as a person
- ii. Emphatic participation with the child for child oriented and humanistic perspective
- iii. An interpretive attitude of respecting the child’s utterances and world of meaning
- iv. Guiding the child in a sensitive way by adjusting and expanding their initiatives
- v. Early care and education is a dialogical process between the child and the carer/teacher.”

So, when analysing this mission with these standards, it can be assumed that Myanmar ECCD approach to education practices care about the right of Childs, their desires and attitudes, their preferences in a humanistic way.

The final mission is the quality assurance for the both infrastructure and the human resources like high-quality training for professionals, volunteers, supervisory systems, monitoring and evaluation programmes with timely provision of materials and interventions for children in emergencies situations (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014) ^[16].

Firstly, as regards the final support, for the purpose of make it more attractive the policy needs to be clearly articulated, coherent and consistent with the purpose and conditions, widely and easily acceptable and underpinned by organizations in order to put them into practice (Wild, Chambers, King & Harris, 2012) ^[19]. When we analyse Myanmar ECCD policy, it was found that policy is not well consistent and the public in the nations are not aware of this policy and consequently, there is a lack attraction for the final support from the public and the volunteers.

Secondly, for the importance of training for professional, because it is very important for early child to be educated and cared for by qualified professionals in public institutions with stimulating activities which are well organised for their development in social competencies (Karila, 2012) ^[6]. In Myanmar, there is a lack for pre-service training for ECCD professionals in current situation, but national pre-service training will be designed and implemented for high quality training for all professionals relating to the policy like ECCD leaders, social workers, specialists, etc. So, in this sense, I think this is actually the urgent plan to be implemented because human resources play crucial role in implementing effective ECCD programme.

2.2 Analysing Objectives

The objectives and plans are very important for any policy because all the actions can be implemented only when the detail and comprehensive objectives are formulated. So, the objectives of ECCD policy will be described and analysed with the UNESCO’s ECCE objectives. The objectives of Myanmar ECCD policy are to

- 1 “Improve birth outcomes and ensure mothers have skilled birth attendants
- 2 Improve and maintain essential parenting skills and ensure children develop well
- 3 Improve the development and status of children 0 to 5 years with developmental delays, malnutrition, chronic illnesses, disabilities and atypical behaviours
- 4 Improve the development of children from 3 to 4 years of age and ensure primary schools. the full participation of parents
- 5 have transition children and parents from home and preschool to inclusive kindergarten and primary school effectively, improving basic literacy and numeracy skills in the mother tongue, and attaining universal primary school completion.
- 6 Ensure full rights for all children with special needs” (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014) ^[16].

When analysing these objectives compared with the general objectives by general objectives of UNESCO’s early childhood, it is found that there are some lack in more initiative to support and strength the program like mobilization of both modern and traditional resources, regional seminars and training sessions to compare experiences and practices, innovative and alternative solutions adapted to the needs of children, reflection and

information exchange and early childhood network at national and regional levels (Pollard & Davidson, 2011) However, when we look at pre-school education it is found that the curricula, educational materials and methods will be reviewed for quality assurance and to meet the cultural and linguistic groups. Moreover, there are child friendly classroom furniture and user-friendly manual and designs for child-centered classrooms for individual and group work. In addition, there are safe and standard kindergarten and primary school playground which is safe and appropriate sports and exercise. Furthermore, there are library with children's books and learning materials in mother tongue and national language as well as computer-based learning. Transition activities, kindergarten and early primary grade instruction will be provided in the mother tongue of the children and minority teachers will be trained to teach in local languages (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014) ^[16] because mother tongue usage will help to ensure children will understand what they are learning, will perform better in school, and will not drop out of school or repeat grades (Ball, 2011) ^[1].

So, from my point of view, objectives in Myanmar emphasize mostly on early stage of childhood (2-3year) and most objectives focus on this stage for care and development, but detail plans can be seen in preschool

education system as mentioned above. Therefore, it can be said that children can have sound foundation of knowledge in their pre-school which is closely related to the better performance in their later life. This concept is well aligned with (Elliott, 2006) ^[4] which reported that early childhood programs with appropriate curricula and pedagogies make students have social and cognitive experiences which can promote independence and positive attitudes to learning in their later life A12p42.

Thus, Myanmar ECCD policy is comprehensive and holistic programme for 0-8 year and the child with sound mind, sound body and sound knowledge can be nurtured for the contribution to the country.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Recommendation based on UN Convention on the Rights the Child

The following recommendation are suggested based on the UN convention on the Rights of Child for Early Childhood (1989) in two parts: one for keeping the existing policy and another for improvement in the future. Table 1 describe recommendation to keep which meets the criteria of UN conventions for the right of child focusing on early childhood.

Table 1: Recommendation to Keep Current ECCD policy

Recommendation to Keep	Myanmar ECCD (Page No)	UN Convention (Article)
To respect each child without discrimination	74	2
To ensure protection and care in standards established by the authorities	77	3
To register immediately after birth and have the right from birth to a name	90	7
Both parents have primary responsibility and their basic concern should be best interest of the child	75	18
A mentally and physically disabled child should enjoy full and decent life, access to and receive education	73	23
To diminish infant and child mortality, provide necessary medical assistance	78	24
Assess to free compulsory education with equal opportunity	28	22
Development of child's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to their full potential	77	29
Child who is a minority or indigenous shall not be denied	74	30
To rest and have leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities	111	31

The following recommendations are provided to improve because these criteria cannot be found in ECCD policy in Myanmar.

Table 2: Recommendation to Improve Current ECCD policy

Recommendation to Improve	UN convention
Every child has the inherent right to life with maximum extent survival	6
respect the right of child to preserve his or her identity,	7
Let child express their own views freely in all matters affecting the child in accordance with the age and maturity of the child	12
Give opportunity for freedom expression with respect of rights of others and protection of national security	13
Let child express freedom of thought, conscience and religion	
Let child express freedom of thought, conscience and religion	

3.1 Conclusion

To conclude Myanmar ECCD policy has been shaped by doing consultation, informing citizen, identifying major needs and challenges priority objectives, considering recommendations and taking into account the results of workshops, interviews and so this is really decentralized policy. There is also cooperation between parents, teachers, children, public, policy makers, other ministries and all the purpose is for the welfare of the early childhood to the full potential productivity from precious human resources. Moreover, this policy has target groups and indicators for

future target, appropriate method and strategy to implement successfully. However, it is really important to evaluate annually or in an appropriate duration according to the needs, structural and cyclical situations of the local context.

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