



Research Paper

Development and Validation of a Curriculum Design for In-Service Training of Pre-School Teachers

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study was to develop and validate a curriculum design for in-service training of preschool teachers using practical action research method through participation of 24 preschool teachers and 6 experts in educational sciences. The results showed that the in-service training program need to extend teachers' understanding, skills and attitudes about child development, children with special needs, educational games, effective communication, children's rights, foundations and principles of learning, arts education and design of learning environments. These objectives could be achieved through selecting and organizing six key syllabus with their specific content headlines. Throughout this course, teachers need to be considered as active participants and the time and the place of the training course should be tailored to their needs and situation. Likewise, teachers' performance should be evaluated by authentic methods and its results need to be considered as a tool to provide constructive feedback and to improve the performance of teachers and their professional promotion.

Keywords: *Action research, Curriculum design, In-service training, Pre-school education*

Introduction

Given the critical role of preschool education in children's future academic achievement, there is a growing interest to professional development of preschool educational community (Buysse, Winton & Rous, 2009; Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin & Knoche, 2009; Egert, Fukkink & Eckhardt, 2018). This is because the pre-service preparation and continuous in-service professional development of preschool teachers is an inevitable necessity to providing quality services to children and their families. The professional development of preschool teachers includes a variety of opportunities for pre-service and in-service learning, which are done to improve the level of professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of preschool teachers so that they could play a more effective role in improving education of students (Eggert et al., 2018). Existing studies indicate that in-service teacher training significantly improves the quality of teacher education and classroom management (Breffni, 2011; Wasik & Hindman, 2011) and thus improves various aspects of cognitive development (Chetty et al., 2011) and the emotional-social development of children (Jensen, Jensen & Rasmussen, 2017).

Research conducted with the Iranian community of preschool teachers indicates that they do not have a favorable situation in terms of educational qualifications, professional ability, management competence, scientific capacity and moral development (Fallah, Ahmadi & Rezazadeh, 2015; Mousavi & Abdolhoseini, 2017). In these studies, the need to develop in-service training programs for preschool teachers has been suggested as a serious necessity. Therefore, considering the importance of in-service training for preschool teachers, the attempts to promote these trainings should be placed at the center of educational policies.

With such an understanding, the present study aimed to provide a context to promote knowledge and professional skills of preschool teachers by developing an in-service training curriculum for preschool teachers, so that they can contribute to the understanding, critique and use of existing knowledge. Consequently, they could play a more efficient role in improving the education of preschool children. One of the main advantages of this study is that the developed curriculum is the product of researchers' collaboration with preschool teachers and reflects their wants, needs and expectations. And this due to employing a practical action research design that allows to develop the curriculum by cooperation of researchers and participants.

Methodology

The present study is an applied research in terms of purpose and qualitative in terms of implementation which conducted through a practical action

research method. Accordingly, researchers and teachers of preschool centers and educational specialists came together by participating in focus group meetings (Mertens, 2005; Nouri & Mohamadi, 2016) and decided on how to design and formulate the structure and framework of the in-service training program and how to implement it in practice. The study conducted in two phases of design and validation. Participants in the design phase included 24 teachers from pre-school centers of Malayer city who came together during meetings to design the initial framework of the in-service training program. Then, this framework was modified and validated through professional meetings with 7 preschool teachers and 6 educational and psychological specialists.

Results

The analysis of data from conversation with 24 teachers led to identification of a set of basic "codes" which were classified according to their common and distinct aspects and categorized into a set of "concepts". Then, the concepts were grouped into larger categories called "themes" based on their conceptual structure. Finally, these themes were organized according to their similarities and differences in four categories including goals, content, teaching and evaluation. In fact, the categories are those basic elements of a curriculum that a curriculum design formed by determining their position. Validation sessions were held with the participation of researchers, 7 preschool teachers and 6 experts in educational sciences and psychology familiar with child studies to review and revise the initial draft. The data analysis of this step did not lead to any changes in the categories, but some changes were made in the themes and concepts of each category based on the agreement of the participants.

In the first category of in-service training program for preschool teachers, eight basic themes were extracted that were considered as general goals of the course and each of them was expressed in the form of a set of specific objectives. In the second category, the content structure of the course was identified according to the objectives set. This structure is in line with the objectives, and each content area has its own syllabus. The general objectives of the curriculum and its main content structure are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: The general objectives of the curriculum and its main content structure

Content Structure	General Objectives
Child development and personality	Understanding the nature of child development in terms of different developmental dimensions Education and assessment of children with special needs
Foundations and principles of learning and education in preschool	Understanding foundations of learning and motivation Making effective communication with children and parents
Educational games for preschool children	Using and designing educational games in preschool settings
Child and teacher rights	Understanding child's rights and teacher's rights
Arts education and teaching through arts	Understanding the role and state of arts in learning and education
Management and designing learning environment	Understanding to design effective learning environment

The third category concluded from data analysis is teaching which represents another key element of an efficient curriculum design. In this category, three basic strategies of instruction were deduced and methods and skills related to each strategy were determined. Finally, in the fourth category, entitled assessment and evaluation, three important procedures were introduced, each of which includes a set of methods that were identified and expressed. The instructional strategies and assessment procedures in the in-service training curriculum for preschool teachers are represented in Table (2).

Table 2: The instructional strategies and assessment procedures in the in-service training curriculum for preschool teachers

Assessment Procedures	Instructional Strategies
Using assessment as a tool to provide constructive feedback	Motivating teacher to active participation
Using forms and methods of performance assessment	Using various tools and methods of teaching
Using evaluation to improving teacher' performance and profession	Employing instructors with professional and technical experiences

Discussion and conclusion

This research led to the production of an in-service training curriculum for preschool teachers organized into four categories: objectives, content structure, teaching strategies and methods, and evaluation procedures and techniques. The results of this study are partly consistent with those of

previous studies (e.g. National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010; United States Agency for International Development, 2011). Based on the results of this study, it is suggested that the future policy of preschool education should pay more attention to in-service teacher training. Specialists with rich professional experience should be used as the instructors of these courses. The results of teachers' participation in these courses should be evaluated and the participation of teachers should ensure their professional and personal development. The curriculum developed as a result of this study needs to be tested and evaluated in different contexts.

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