THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP ON PRESCHOOL TEACHER TRAINING IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and examine the impact of participatory workshop on preschool teachers training in Sri Lanka. To this end, the evaluation sheets used are examined in a quantitative and qualitative manner. The participatory workshop on preschool teacher training was held over a four days period, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The workshop focused on improving the quality and efficacy of lessons. To this end, participants were required to develop teaching material and mock lessons on the theme of peace. Analysis of the evaluation sheets used by 16 participants revealed that the degree of "Very High (4)" with the highest evaluation increased day by day from day one to day four. For the item "to what extent did the training help you to develop useful contacts or networking for your future benefit?" a significant difference ($p <. 05$) was observed between days two and three. Therefore, it can be said that the participatory workshop enabled the participants to create a network and develop contacts. In the free description column, comments related to "Education method", "Specific activity content", "Mock lesson" and "Japanese culture and education" were majorly included; however, comments related to "peace" were not included. The preschool teachers in Sri Lanka were interested in the activities and educational methods used in early childhood education in Japan, and because they were not used to training, there is a possibility that the priority for the keyword "peace" in their comments was low.

Keywords: Teacher Training, Participatory Workshop, Preschool Education.

1. Introduction

Sri Lanka is the first country to provide free education to its citizens from the primary school level to the university level (Jayaratne, 2015). With a primary school enrollment rate of over 99 % (UNICEF, 2013), Sri Lanka has one of the most literate populations amongst developing nations (Gunawardena, 1997). In Sri Lanka, children between the ages of 3 and 4 typically attend preschool, whereas children between the ages of 5 and 9 attend elementary school (grades 1–5). Elementary and junior high school are compulsory in Sri Lanka—this amounts to a total of nine years of compulsory education. Matsumoto et al (2014) point out, although education in Sri Lanka is compulsory, preschool education is not regarded as a matter of national policy. Enrollment rate at the preschool level in Sri Lanka has increased from 43% in 1994 to 87% in 2011. However, they state that the governmental organization, in charge of preschool education, has undergone frequent and drastic changes over the last two decades. And owing to this instability, it has not been possible to implement a strong preschool education policy. Additionally, there are not enough facilities to train soon-to-be preschool teachers. Shimizu and Tsubokawa (2007) point out that various nongovernmental

organizations and entrepreneurial ventures are involved in preschool teacher training in Sri Lanka. However, they state that the involvement of these organizations has been necessitated by the lack of comprehensive preschool education policies. They also state that existing policies are incapable of facilitating the professional development of preschool teachers. A field survey conducted by Mitsui (2016) reveals that preschool teachers in Sri Lanka do not receive adequate institutional or professional support despite their expectations for in-service training programs regarding effective childcare. In the previous research, although the importance of training for preschool teachers in Sri Lanka is mentioned, there are few clarifications about the effect of the training.

Therefore, this study aims to identify and examine the impact of the participatory workshop on preschool teachers in Sri Lanka. In addition, this study also throws light on the areas of improvement in teacher training projects in Sri Lanka. To this end, the evaluation sheets used in this study are examined in a quantitative as well as a qualitative manner.

2. Outline of the Participatory Workshop

Purpose of the participatory workshop

The workshop was designed to improve the quality and efficacy of lessons, to address the needs of preschool teachers in Sri Lanka. To this end, participants were required to develop teaching materials and mock lessons on the theme of peace. The 25-year-long civil war in Sri Lanka, which ended in 2009, was fought between the Sinhalese community and the Tamil community. Sri Lanka is a relatively poor country, with unequal opportunities for its multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious population. The Sinhalese - principally Buddhist - majority represents 74% of the population and lives mostly in the south. Tamils – primarily Hindu – account for 18% of the population, and primarily inhabit the north and east of the island (Perera, 2000). Therefore, peace education was considered necessary at the preschool level. The participatory workshop aimed to (i) shed more light on Japanese culture and education, (ii) to facilitate discussions about peace, and (iii) to enable participants to develop a lesson plan. To achieve these goals, the workshop was based on participatory approach. Chambers (2002) showed the facilitators' skills and attitudes necessary for learning interactively in "participatory workshops". As per Nakano (2001), workshops are research meetings characterized by participants' active involvement; conversely, those who participate in a workshop are typically non-passive. Specific ally in psychology and education, the style called workshop is now getting accepted (Stanfield, 2002).The workshop employed the participatory approach to enable participants to learn about Japanese culture and education. Moreover, peace education needs to learner-centered and participatory pedagogy in order to be effective (Green, 1997). More importantly, the method allowed participants to develop lesson plans by sharing their experiences and knowledge with one another.

Schedule and contents of the participatory workshop

The participatory workshop was held by the Citynet Yokohama Project Office from September 19 to September 22, 2017. Participants were divided into four groups for the activities, and each group consisted of four participants. On Day 1, participants introduced themselves, and they were also introduced to certain aspects of Japanese culture, such as education and Origami, among other things. In addition, participants were briefed about the educational activities typically conducted in Japanese kindergartens. Participants were also introduced to the Lesson Study method, and the processes involved in creating mock lessons.

On Day 2, participants were trained in peace education. The Hiroshima situation was cited to illustrate the nuances of peace education, and visual aids were also used in this session. In addition, participants were involved in discussions about peace, and they were also required to develop visual teaching material, such as picture stories modeled in the style of "Kamishibai" and posters about peace. Participants also tried their hand at the Japanese card game "Karuta." On Day 3, participants were introduced to the processes involved in developing educational material for story-based teaching methods. Participants were also required to develop mock lessons. They also assessed the mock lessons and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the lessons developed by each group. Day 4 involved discussions about their action plans. The workshop concluded with the "Our Future Tree" session, in which participants expressed their career goals and ambitions. As a daily wrap-up activity, each group summarized the main points discussed in the training sessions.

Participants

A total of 16 participants in Colombo city, including eight each from public kindergartens and private kindergartens, participated in the study. All were female, 14 were Sinhalese, and 2 were Tamil. The average age of teachers was 35.6 years, and the average percentage of student–teacher ratio of kindergartens was 23.6. The Colombo Municipal Council, which was a counterpart of Citynet Yokohama Project Office, and has jurisdiction over kindergartens in the Colombo city, selected the participants.

3. Research Methodology

Analyzing filled in evaluation sheets

Participants filled in evaluation sheets anonymously at the end of each day of training. The evaluation sheets consisted of 11 items: Q 1 to Q 11. Each item consisted of 4 gradations (answers to be chosen by the participants): "Very High (4)", "Satisfactory (3)", "Somewhat Satisfactory (2)", and "Not Satisfactory (1)." Participants could also write comments in the spacious columns provided next to each item, with the exception of Q11. Items Q12 to Q15 required detailed answers from the participants. Items Q1 to Q11 were analyzed in a quantitative manner; participants' comments for each of these items were analyzed in qualitative manner (with the exception of Q11). Table 1 shows the contents of the items that constitute the evaluation sheet.

Table 1.   *Contents of Question Items*

No.	Contents of Question Items	Answer Method
1	To what extent did the training meet your expectations?	
2	To what extent was the training relevant to your city, your work or functions?	
3	To what extent did the training help you to develop useful contacts or networking for your future benefit?	
4	To what extent were you able to express your experience/view during training?	
5	How was the quality of the content and presentation?	
6	How was the quality of the speakers?	**4 grade mark**
7	How appropriate was the time allocated to the opening/closing sessions, presentations and discussion (Q&A)	**&**
8	To what extent were you satisfied with the logistical aspects (i.e. venue /facilities, documentations, etc.)?	**Free description**
9	To what extent do you think you could locally adopt and apply the lessons learnt from the forum?	
10	To what extent were you able to identify the most suitable approaches in achieving your goals and/or in defining the next steps after returning to your work place?	
11	**What is your overall assessment of the training?**	**4 grade mark**
12	What key learnings/benefits did you receive from the attending the training?	
13	What part/aspect was MOST useful and applicable for you?	
14	What part/aspect was LEAST useful or applicable for you?	**Free description**
15	Please provide any comments/suggestions about the training or how we could improve our future events.	

4. Results

Quantitative analysis of items (Q1 to Q11)

Table 2 shows the trend of average percentage of each rating per day using the summation result of the 4 grades evaluation by items entered by the participants. Not the least rated "Not at all (1)" did not go through for 4 days. Further, the highest evaluation "Very High (4)" is increasing throughout the four days.

Table 2: The percentage of points per day (%)

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Very High (4)	75.35	76.71	91.57	93.06
Satisfactory (3)	23.94	21.92	7.83	5.78
Bellow Satisfactory (2)	0.70	1.37	0.60	1.16
Not at All (1)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to clarify whether the evaluation by item from Q1 to Q11 is a statistically significant difference. As a result, since there was a significant difference in the two items Q3 and Q10, the significant probability was calculated for each pair from Day 1 to Day 4 (Tables 3. and 4.). The p-value in the tables is Bonferroni correction. A significant difference ($p < .05$) was seen between Day 2 and Day 3 in Q3, and in Q10, a significant

difference ($p <. 05$) was seen between Day 2 and Day 4.

Table 3: Result of Kruskal-Wallis test in Q3

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Day 1	–	9.198	-4.094	-3.852
Day 2		–	-3.292*	-13.050
Day 3			–	.242
Day 4				–

*: $p<.05$

Table 4: Result of Kruskal-Wallis test in Q10

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Day 1	–	12.325	6.557	-.850
Day 2		–	-5.768	-13.175*
Day 3			–	-7.407
Day 4				–

*: $p<.05$

Qualitative analysis of free description

Comments written in the free description column totaled to 344 (236 comments from Q1 to Q10, and 108 comments from Q12 to Q15). They included simple descriptions, such as "Yes" or "Very good."

Regarding the descriptions from Q1 to Q10, most of them included positive comments; however, in the free description column of Q4 on Day 3 and Day 4, comments such as "Due to language issues we couldn't express what we wanted to say," were included. Both these participants had marked "Below Satisfactory (2)."

Regarding the descriptions from Q12 to Q15, most of them included positive comments. In the comments for Q12: "What was the key to learning and benefits in training?" comments related to "knowledge (7)", "concrete activity content (4)" and "education method (3)" were included. In the comment for Q13: "Which part do you think is most useful or adaptable?" comments on "education method (12)," "specific activity content (4)," and "mock lesson (2)," were included. In the comment for Q14: "Which part is the most useless or unable to adapt?" the specific description was particularly not found. In the comment for Q15: "What kind of follow-up activities will be conducted after the training?" Comments such as, "I hope to share the knowledge we derived with those who did not come to this training program," "We impart our experience to the other teachers, and if you can impart this training to the others, it is better than being good," "We accept this training and wish to contribute more to our teachers," were included; further, a statement that "The session is really good and we learned a lot of new things from you. It would be good to have an English translator the next time this training is conducted." was included.

5. Discussion

As shown in Table2, the participants have evaluated well and "Very High (4)," which has the highest evaluation, and is on an increasing trend through the 4 days; so, the evaluation has gone up gradually. In the item for Q3:"To what extent did the training help you develop useful contacts or networking for your future benefit?" a significant difference ($p <. 05$)was seen

between Day 2 and Day 3. The mock lessons were divided into four groups, therefore, teaching materials, such as songs, dramas, picture-story: "kamishibai," crafts, were introduced. In the mock lessons, they were trained not only to implement the teachings in the lessons but also introduced the teaching materials that they created and exchanged as opinions, such as points for improvement in the lessons. This was a consequence of using participatory approach that conducted mock lessons, which deepened and enabled participants to network and exchange on Day 3. Further, in Q10: "To what extent were you able to identify the most suitable approaches in achieving your goals and/or in defining the next steps after returning to your work place?" a significant difference (p <.05) was seen between Day 2 and Day 4. As the workshop progressed, the learners could visualize the lesson to be concretely practiced at their preschools.

Positive comments were mostly included in the free description column of the evaluation sheet, and comments for improvement were only in terms of language requests, such as interpreters for Sinhalese. Previous research had reported that Sri Lanka's preschool teacher training was not sufficiently supported by government, and they had a strong desire to learn specific childcare methods through training (Mitsui, 2016). Therefore, the participatory workshop was highly evaluated by the preschool teachers. In the free description column, comments related to "education method," "specific activity content," "mock lesson," and "Japanese culture and education" were majorly included; however, comments related to "peace" were not included. The preschool teachers in Sri Lanka were interested in the activities and educational methods used in preschool education in Japan, and because they were not used to training, there is a possibility that the priority for the keyword "peace" in their comments was low. Lopez Cardozo (2008) points out that peace education in Sri Lanka cannot succeed in isolation and needs to be incorporated in a multilevel process of peace building. To put peace education as a theme in Sri Lanka was too broad for participants and may have been difficult. It may be due to the existence of a difference in peace education dealt with in Japan and Sri Lanka. Thus, it can be observed that all the objectives of the workshop were not accomplished.

Finally, points of improvement that have to be kept in mind when holding future workshops can be described as follows. Through this study, the impact of the participatory workshop for preschool teachers in Sri Lanka was recognized at least to a certain extent. Therefore, it is necessary to hold a regular and continuous teacher training workshop in the future. It can be said that continuous training allows for a deeper level learning, and widespread knowledge can be obtained through this effort. However, it was recognized to some extent that the workshop did not touch upon "peace"; for example, setting a theme immediately after investigating the participants' readiness. Further, a few participants, citing better workshop effectiveness, requested as follows: considering that preschool teachers do not have sufficient higher education, if there is a Sinhalese language interpreter, who can also work.

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