

Early Childhood Teacher Education Programs in Selected Private Universities in Lebanon

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Abstract

Research on early childhood programs has demonstrated social, cognitive and economic benefits for children. With highly qualified teachers who hold college degrees, children learn best. But having a degree is necessary, yet not sufficient to ensure that all children from birth to age 8 learn and develop to their highest potential. What matters is the quality of teacher preparation programs. Using phone interviews, document reviews and surveys, this paper explored key features of early childhood programs in selected universities in Lebanon along interconnected elements such as program content, faculty characteristics, field experiences, and institutional support. The paper also identified challenges to the programs. Findings point to the variation in coursework, field experiences, faculty characteristics, and age-group focus.

ملخص

تشير الأبحاث المتعلقة ببرامج الطفولة المبكرة الى ان الاستثمار في برامج ذات جودة عالية يؤدي الى فوائد اجتماعية واقتصادية هامة. فالاطفال يتعلمون بصورة افضل مع معلمين يتمتعون بكفاءة عالية ويحملون درجات علمية . غير أن حصول المعلم على درجة علمية مسألة ضرورية ولكن ليست كافية لتوفير الجودة في التربية والتعليم للأطفال من الولادة وحتى سن الثامنة. المهم في هذا المجال هو جودة برامج اعداد معلمي الطفولة المبكرة. وقد استعرضت هذه الورقة عن طريق المقابلات الهاتفية ومراجعة الوثائق واستطلاع آراء المعنيين سمات رئيسة لبرامج اعداد معلمي الطفولة المبكرة في جامعات مختارة في لبنان، وذلك لجهة مضمون البرامج، سمات المعلمين، الخبرة الميدانية، والدعم المؤسسي. كما بيّنت الورقة ابرز

التحديات التي تواجه هذه البرامج. وتشير النتائج إلى التنوع في المقررات الدراسية والخبرات الميدانية وسمات المعلمين والتركيز على فئات عمرية معينة.

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge base, research studies, emerging standards for teacher education and recent brain development research in the early childhood field has expanded substantially. Longitudinal studies over the past forty years have demonstrated the importance of early years' experience as it impacts individual's later success in the areas of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Subsequently, research studies showed that teachers with a college degree provided better classroom quality, positive teacher-child interactions, and gains in child outcomes (Berk, 1985; Barnett, 2003; Whitebook, 2003). However, Early and a large research team (2006, 2007) found that the association between program quality and teacher education was not entirely consistent nor related, and that teachers' effectiveness is influenced by the quality of their preparation and content, and by the context and level of support they receive.

This study is exploratory and aims at examining the status of early childhood teacher education programs (hereafter referred to as ECTEP) in private recognized institutes of higher education (hereafter referred to as IHE) in Lebanon that offer an undergraduate degree in early childhood education and whose language of instruction is English. It begins with an overview of the literature on teacher education and then examines the structure of ECTEPs by looking at the content, faculty characteristics, field experiences, and addresses the challenges facing them. Finally, the paper proposes a set of recommendations based on the findings and discussion.

1- TEACHER EDUCATION AND CLASSROOM QUALITY

Studies have associated higher levels of teachers' education with better teaching and better outcomes for children (Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997) and teachers' behavior as one of the major influences on child development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Thus, qualified teachers are an essential component of

preschool programs that result in improved outcomes for young children (Barnett, 2003; Whitebook, 2003). Teachers with college degrees were more likely than those without a degree to encourage children, make suggestions to them and promote children's verbal skills (Berk, 1985) and provide better quality of care and instruction (Burchinal et al., 2002). Furthermore, teachers with both a bachelor's degree and specialized training in child development and early education have been found to create a more positive emotional climate (Pianta, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 2005), were more sensitive and engaged children in more creative activities than were teachers with no formal training in early childhood (Howes, 1997). In addition, children exhibited a more developed use of language and performed at a higher level on cognitive tasks than children who were cared for by less-qualified adults (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001).

However, recent studies have provided contradictory findings on the importance of both formal education and specialized training and its association with quality programs. For example, the link between teacher education and classroom quality disappeared when other structural features such as adult-child ratio and salaries were added to the model (Phillipsen et al., 1997). In addition, Early et al. (2007) found fewer links between children's outcomes and teachers' qualifications such as educational level, college major or credentials and classroom quality. There were even null or contradictory findings concerning the relationship between classroom quality, children's educational outcomes, and the educational attainment and majors of their teachers.

Nevertheless, teacher education does matter for children's learning (Early et al., 2006; 2007). Teacher quality is too complex and there may be three possible explanations for the lack of association. These have to do with the nature of the teacher preparation program due to variations in degree, major, and certification (Early et al., 2007), the support system within workplace (Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber, & Howes, 2001; Early et al., 2007), and the market forces (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003).

Thus, though a bachelor's degree is necessary, it is not sufficient to inform about the quality of teacher preparation or to ensure classroom quality or child outcomes.

1-1- Review of Literature on Early Childhood Teacher Education Programs

The aforementioned findings on teacher education and classroom quality have led to increased public attention on the early childhood years and policy making and have raised questions about teacher preparation programs that serve children from birth to age 8.

Linda Darling-Hammond (2006) described seven core elements as a result of her study of exemplary teacher preparation programs. These elements include a shared vision of good teaching; well-defined standards of professional practice; a strong core curriculum; extended clinical experiences; use of case methods and teacher research; addressing of students' own deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about learning; and building strong relationships among school- and university-based faculty.

Based on these core elements, teacher education programs should include courses related to academic subject content, child development, and knowledge of appropriate teaching practices, field experiences, research, advocacy and reflection. In his research on teacher education programs, Levine (2006) highlighted the need to set standards for admitting students to teacher preparation, pay attention to the tendency of programs to emphasize theory over practice, and address the time spent in field experiences which is often short.

Research into teacher preparation programs has looked at faculty characteristics, coursework and field experience requirements, admission standards and the challenges facing these programs and the age group these programs focus on (Levine, 2006; Early & Winton, 2001; Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006).

ECTEPs are different from other teacher education programs although they may share common elements. Early childhood teachers must be equipped with broad knowledge of development and learning across the birth-age 8 ranges (birth-3, 3-5, 5-8) and be familiar with appropriate curriculum and assessment approaches across that age span. Furthermore, early childhood teachers work in many varied settings besides schools such as child care and home-based programs (Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009).

Thus, in order to examine ECTEP, it is important to look at some of the key components of any quality program notably standards, program quality (type of training, preparation, and field experience that the teacher

was required to undertake to achieve the degree), and faculty characteristics (Whitebook et al., 2009).

1-1-1- Standards

Standards are used as an approach to defining and assessing quality of ECTEPs and for program improvement. Standards provide a roadmap into the expectations of teaching; they define the knowledge, skills, and dispositions. They play a key role in defining high quality professional preparation in terms of sets of competencies that well-prepared graduates should possess. In Hyson, Tomlinson, and Morris (2008) study, there were positive efforts toward quality improvement in ECE higher-education programs by reliance on standards in determining coursework and field work and more focus on teaching prospective teachers how to implement quality curricula correctly. However, the research raised concerns as to not doing enough to developing supportive teacher-child interactions.

In the USA, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) works with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) to review early childhood undergraduate and graduate degree programs at colleges and universities. The revised standards of NAEYC (2011) are used across both CAEP and NAEYC accreditation systems in higher education and they involve: (1) promoting child development and learning; (2) building family and community relationships; (3) observing, documenting, and assessing to support young children and families; (4) using developmentally effective approaches; (5) using content knowledge to build meaningful curriculum; (6) becoming a professional; and (7) early childhood field experiences.

1-1-2- Program Quality

The diversity of age focus poses a challenge for ECTEPs as they are expected to provide student teachers with a strong foundation in various early childhood educational topics. Effective programs include courses on child development, subject matter content, pedagogical strategies, assessment, and methods of working effectively with families and professionals (Bowman et al., 2001). Teachers also need to know how to facilitate learning across the content areas for diverse groupings of children and to apply their pedagogical knowledge in planning, assessing and adapting instruction to meet the needs of individual children (NAEYC, 2011). Prospective teachers are expected to have coursework that provides

them with direct field experience with young children in a variety of settings such as observations, practica, and student teaching.

Programs emphasizing child or human development differ greatly in their depth of focus on young children (Hyson, Tomlinson, & Morris, 2009). Programs do not offer in-depth coursework that addresses the complex educational and developmental needs of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers (Maxwell et al., 2006; Ray, Bowman, & Robbins, 2006; Whitebook, Bellm, Lee, & Sakai, 2005). In their survey of 438 programs at 2 and 4- year institutions, Early & Winton (2001) noted that there is limited coursework that addresses diversity or special education and most early childhood teachers are graduating from teacher preparation programs with little or no experience working with infants.

1-1-3- Field Experiences

Field experiences provide prospective teachers with opportunities to link theory with practice where they observe, practice, reflect, and develop teaching skills and dispositions in real classroom settings under the guidance and supervision of a mentor or cooperating classroom teacher (Levine, 2006). Such clinical experiences differ in their goals, intensity and frequency, time devoted to student supervision and mentoring, quality of field sites, and degree of partnership between the sites and the IHE program. These variations have an impact on the overall quality of student teachers' preparation.

Experts recommend that field-based learning should consist of "observation, apprenticeship, guided practice, knowledge application, and inquiry" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1024). The terms "practicum," "field work," and "student teaching" have often been used interchangeably in the research literature on field experiences and in the early childhood education field overall, but this similarity can distort the significant variation in the objectives, intensity, and outcomes of such efforts.

In this paper, the term "student teaching" refers to *situations where the student teacher is in the classroom, with supervision by a cooperating teacher, and with increasing responsibility for curriculum planning and teaching. At this stage, student teachers are more likely to observe and assist the cooperating teacher and provide individual teaching. As for "practicum" it refers to student teacher's experience in teaching a specific age group and subject matter, and supervised by a faculty member and the cooperating teacher.*

Despite their critical importance, supervised teaching experiences may be poorly integrated into the course of study in ECTEPs, lack rigorous supervision or focus, or occur in poor-quality settings with few or no opportunities to work with children below kindergarten age, or with families.

1-1-4- Faculty Characteristics

Information about faculty demographics and professional background is essential for understanding the relationship between program content and faculty experience and knowledge.

Faculty members' academic background and professional experience with young children are also likely to influence the theoretical and pedagogical content of the curriculum and the depth of its focus on infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The work load of faculty and field staff shape the frequency and depth of guidance available to prospective teachers (Whitebook et al., 2012).

ECTEPs tend to be severely under-resourced, with heavier teaching loads for faculty (Maxwell et al., 2006; Whitebook, et al., 2005). Many programs include faculty with limited academic or work experience directly related to early childhood (Hyson et al., 2009; Maxwell et al., 2006; Ray et al., 2006; Whitebook et al., 2005). In addition, and according to Early and Winton (2001), early childhood departments have a disproportionate number of part-time and adjunct faculty members and higher faculty-to-student ratios than other departments on their campuses (Maxwell et al., 2006; Whitebook et al., 2005).

Faculty experience in working with children is an important element in the ECTEP. In one study, only 64% of the faculty had experience working with 3- or 4-year-olds (Early and Winton, 2001). Whitebook et al. (2009) noted that nearly one-third of faculty members in upper-division and graduate ECTEPs in the USA have no experience working with children prior to kindergarten, and many do not have specific academic preparation in early childhood education.

2-RELEVANT RESEARCH ON LEBANON

There is limited research on ECTEPs in Lebanon. To the best of this author's knowledge, Hoteit (2002) is the only relevant study. She examined ECTEPs in three major universities in Lebanon; one public and two private. Hoteit noted the variation in the programs which ranged from an emphasis

on the theoretical aspect to one that combines pedagogy with field experiences while another is a comprehensive program. All programs lacked courses that dealt with family and community and in some programs there were no courses on curriculum planning or child development. There was more emphasis on academics and less on psychology or development. Though early childhood encompasses a wide age range from birth to age 8, these programs focused on teaching children aged 3 to 6 (Hoteit, 2002).

The scarcity of relevant research on ECTEPs in Lebanon can be attributed to several factors. For a long time, there has been no law that requires preschool teachers to be holders of a bachelor's degree. More importantly, early childhood major was not a field of education in colleges and universities even among those that had an education major. The only university that offered early childhood education was the Lebanese American University-LAU. This major was offered under the Human Development major until 1998 when the major became part of the Education and Social Sciences Division.

With regard to teachers' level of education and program quality, Faour (2003) found that teachers who held a degree in early childhood education had the highest frequency of developmentally appropriate practices while those who held a degree in elementary education had the lowest frequency of developmentally appropriate practices among degree holders. In another study, Bashur (1996) reported that the majority of the preschool teachers from private, public and semi-private schools did not have a university degree and almost all of the preschool and kindergarten teachers lacked child development knowledge.

3- KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of the above literature review on teacher education and teacher preparation programs, the study will address the following questions:

- 1- What are the program characteristics with regard to admission criteria, departments in which they are housed, required coursework, age range focus and accreditation or presence of reliance on standards?
- 2- What is the nature of the clinical field experiences, related policies, required hours and supervision?
- 3- What are the faculty characteristics as they relate to level of education, employment status, teaching experience, professional development, and expertise in early childhood field?

- 4- What are the key challenges facing these early childhood teacher preparation programs?

4- METHOD

Different research methodologies are employed to study ECTEPs. Some involved survey information about the content of courses, faculty characteristics, and institutional context of programs (Hyson et al., 2009). Others (Ray et al., 2006) analyzed online descriptions of courses in 226 programs nationwide in the USA that offer a bachelor's degree in ECE while others gathered information via phone interviews with one representative from each of the selected IHEs (Maxwell et al., 2006).

Data sources for this study used IHE website, most recent catalogues, and surveys sent to at least one representative of the program. The survey collected pertinent information on the early childhood program by:

1. Identifying the departments in which the program is housed and degrees and certificates offered.
2. Defining certain aspects of the program such as age focus for children, accreditation, coursework, duration and supervision of clinical/field experiences.
3. Describing the profiles of faculty members- their employment status, relevant teaching experience/expertise and challenges.

Universities in Lebanon are diverse in terms of the language of instruction, their affiliations, for profit or not-for-profit. According to the website of the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (last updated 18/12/2013), there are 32 recognized private universities, eight colleges and institutes and three institutes for religious studies. In addition, there is the Lebanese University which is public and funded by the government. Nineteen of these private universities (60%) offer an undergraduate degree in education and twelve of them offer early childhood education, thereby comprising the study population for this study (Table 1).

From these twelve universities, only those that offer their degrees in English (5) were selected into the sample. Of those five, two declined to participate. The final sample consisted of three universities (MEHE website, 2013).

Table 1.*Universities by Undergraduate BA- Early Childhood and Type of Language of Instruction*

University	Language of Instruction
1. Université Saint-Joseph – USJ	French
2. Makassed University	Arabic and English
3. Notre Dame University-Louaize - NDU	English
4. LAU	English
5. Haigazian University	English
6. Lebanese International University - LIU	English
7. Modern University for Business & Sciences MUBS	English
8. Holy Spirit University of Kaslik-USEK	French
9. Kafaat University	French
10. AlJinan University	French and English
11. Lebanese German University - LGU	French and English
12. Holy Family University-USF- Batroun	French and English

http://www.higher-edu.gov.lb/arabic/privuniv/personal_univ.html last updated 18/12/2013

5- FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and provides discussions based on the research questions as they relate to program characteristics, clinical field experiences, faculty characteristics, and the key challenges to these programs. The names of the three private IHE have been removed to ensure anonymity.

5-1- Program Characteristics

The three private IHEs offer a 3-year undergraduate education degree with emphasis on early childhood degree programs. Their admission criteria for students are related to the university general admission requirements. Two of them are housed in the School of Arts and Sciences within the department of education. The third program is under the School of Education and Social Work.

As for the number of students, there are variations depending on the capacity of the IHE- in the larger ones where the total number of students is beyond 2000, the numbers are between 51 and 100. Program A has around 900 students in total and between 26 and 50 students in the early childhood

major. Two of the programs rely on benchmarking their programs with internationally recognized standards such as NAEYC and others (Table 2).

Main age focus- Programs A & B reported that the program focuses on all age groups whereas Program C focuses mainly on children 3-8 years of age. However, it became evident that what is reported is different from what is written in the course description in the catalogue. As websites were searched for specific content titles or course descriptions, it became apparent that the emphasis is more on preschool-age children (ages three through six years) and less on children in the early elementary grades as described in the course description. Furthermore, the course descriptions do not show in their content focus on infants and toddlers particularly in field experience courses.

Coursework-(Table 2). The early childhood degree is part of an emphasis degree where students take general university requirements, core education requirements, and emphasis courses. The total number of credits covers three years on average. There are some variations in the total number of credit hours. All programs require 24 credits as emphasis on early childhood.

Table 2.
Program Characteristics

	Program A	Program B	Program C
Unit housed	Arts & Sciences Department of Education	Arts and Sciences Department of Education	School of Education & Social Work
Currently enrolled students	26-50 students	51 - 100 students	51 - 100 students
Degrees awarded to students annually	11-25 students	51 - 100 students	11 - 25 students
Main age focus	All ages (0-8)	All ages (0-8)	3-8 years
Standards/Benchmark	NAEYC, NCATE* ,	NYDOE***, NAEYC, INTASC**, as well as other content and professional standards	Ministry of Education, Universities' union, Observations, workshops, interviews

Total number of credits to complete degree	97	95	94
Number of credits with early childhood emphasis courses	24	24	24 out of 33 credits
Number of credits for core education courses	37	30	34

*NCATE National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

**INTASC-The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium

***NYDOE- New York City Department of Education

All these degree programs required coursework on multiple topics related to child development and learning; teaching and curriculum; teaching skills; use of technology and observation. All programs reported the courses listed in Table 3 as requirements for emphasis. The emphasis on academic content prevails. However, variations exist in other course requirements by program. Only one program requires a course in administering early childhood programs. This would suggest that other programs do not prepare students to be child-care program directors or administrators.

Table 3.

Reported Required Early Childhood Coursework in All Programs

Area	Courses	Program
Content area	Teaching math skills to children	All Programs
	Teaching science skills to children	
	Teaching literacy skills to children	
	Teaching creative arts to children	
	Teaching social studies to children	
Diversity Child Development	Teaching children with special needs	All Programs
	Children's development and learning	All Programs
	Children's social development	Program A Program B
Teaching Skills	Using technology	All Programs
	Use of different teaching techniques (e.g. planning, instruction)	
	Classroom management	

Field experiences	Observation, assessment, and documentation	All Programs
Curriculum	Integrated curriculum	All Programs
Program Administration	Early childhood administration	Program A
	Program planning, development, and operations	Program A Program C
Reflective Practitioner	The early care and education profession	Program A Program B

Courses dealing with issues of advocacy or public policy, working with families, teaching children with challenging behaviors, or human resources/personnel policies were not major requirements in any of these programs. In some they were either optional or not required. The study confirms the earlier findings of Hoteit (2002) that showed there were more coursework on academic content, focus on 3-6 age group and little attention to working with family. Furthermore, these findings are consistent with previous international studies that showed that programs give inadequate attention to coursework for infants and toddlers and families (Maxwell et al., 2006; Ray et al., 2006; Whitebook et al., 2005). It is apparent that there are gaps in preparation programs for working with infants and toddlers as well as program management and administration and working with families and communities.

5-2- Field Experiences

The three programs reported that they require students to participate in clinical field experiences. Although two programs reported that student teachers get to participate in settings for various age groups, what is reported is not consistent with what is stated in the course descriptions. For example, in Program C the emphasis is more on preschool-age children (ages three through six years) and less on children in the early elementary grades. Furthermore, the course descriptions do not show explicitly the focus in their content on infants and toddlers particularly in practicum courses. These findings are similar to Early and Winton (2001) who found that only 29% of the programs provided practicum experience in setting that focused on children of four years and younger.

The findings show that the main age focus for all three programs is for preschool age. This is similar to what Hyson et al. (2008) found: the field experience provide few or no opportunities to work with children below kindergarten age, or few or no opportunities to work with families

Although Programs A and B reported that their students get an opportunity to observe and practice in early elementary, the course descriptions do not reflect that and further discussion with some revealed that it depends on the cooperating schools.

The number of hours required for field experiences and their timing in the program varied. The hours ranged from 60 to 240 (Table 4).

Table 4.
Timing of Field Experience and Corresponding Number of Hours

Timing of field experience	Number of Hours for Student Teaching	Number of Hours for Practicum
First year of the degree program	10 Program C	
Middle of the degree program	15 Program A 60 Program B 10 Program C	
End of the degree program	120 Program A 120 Program B 40 Program C	60 Program B 60 Program A

Similar substantial variation in duration and the timing of students' field experiences have been reported in other studies (Levine, 2006; Whitebook et al., 2009; Whitebook et al., 2012).

In addition, the findings in Table 5 on selection of settings by ECTEPs to provide opportunities for prospective teachers to observe and practice show that in Programs A and B, the quality of the curriculum and reputations of the school are key factors in placement of students. Location is an important contributing factor since students have to manage their schedules between university courses and school sites.

Table 5.
Criteria for Selecting Field Experience Settings

Program	Criteria used
Program A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality learning environment and innovative curriculum • Professional-apply mostly what we teach • Location • Availability and willingness to accommodate students
Program B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somewhat not documented properly • Quality and reputation of site • Preparation of cooperating teachers • Progressive curricula
Program C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students choice, good teaching

As for the choice of cooperating teachers, findings showed that Programs A and B try to establish a criterion while none are present for Program C (Table 6). Program A expressed concern over field experience – “Placing prospective teachers in child-care settings is of great concern since many of possible cooperating teachers or mentors may not have a degree or any type of specialized training- thus raising serious issues about the quality of that field experience”. The findings show that there is an urgent need for high quality placements and mentoring.

Table 6.
Criteria for Selecting Cooperating Teachers for Field Experiences

Program	Criteria used
Program A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching experience • Qualified teacher who is also willing to cooperate, • Based on annual evaluation of cooperating teachers from previous years.
Program B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to date with educational advances • Mentorship qualities • Ability to delegate
Program C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

5-3 Faculty Characteristics

Regarding the composition and status of faculty members, Programs A and B have no part timers whereas in Program C the number of part-timers is almost double that of full-timers. The findings show an inconsistent pattern compared to findings in US studies in terms of status of faculty (Maxwell et al., 2006; Early and Winton, 2001; Whitebook et al., 2005). Students are also taught by faculty whose area of specialization is in elementary education. All programs have some faculty who has had direct experience working with children (Table 7).

Table 7.
Number of Faculty and Their Qualification

	Program A	Program B	Program C
Number of Full-time	3	2	4
Number of Part-time	None	None	7
Qualification of Full-time PhD or EdD	2	2	2

Qualification of Full-time MA	1	None	3
Qualification of Part-time PhD	None	None	4
Qualification of Part-time MA	None	None	2
Area of Expertise of Full-timers	1 Early childhood 1 Elementary Education 1 Psychology	2 Elementary Education 1 Early childhood	1 Early childhood 3 Elementary Education
Area of Expertise of Part-timers			3 Elementary Education
Direct experience of Full-timers working with children birth to age 8	1 in kindergarten 1 in elementary	1 Early childhood	2 Early childhood
Direct experience of Part-timers working with children birth to age 8			6 Early childhood

5-4- Key Challenges

The programs reported key challenges across the areas of recruiting full-time faculty and lack of ability to recruit students. Programs A and B reported that inequitable distribution of resources compared to other programs in the institution poses a challenge as well as lack of access to quality “clinical experience” sites.

Two programs (A & C) addressed the issue of prospective teachers’ inability to abandon the traditional methods of teaching and embrace the constructivist approaches as well as develop serious commitment to the profession.

5-5- Limitations

The study suffers from a number of limitations:

1. Survey of IHE is limited to those whose language of instruction is completely in English
2. Limited number of faculty asked
3. The quality of instruction by looking at course syllabi and assessment procedures was not examined.
4. Reliance on self-reporting

However, despite these methodological limitations, and based on the researcher's own personal experience with ECTEP, the findings are likely to apply to the universities that were not included.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This exploratory study of undergraduate ECTEPs in Lebanon underscored the existing variations in educating prospective teachers in relation to course content, faculty characteristics, field experiences, and age focus. The findings illustrated the gaps in providing explicit coursework for infants and toddlers working with families and administering child care programs. It also emphasized the shared challenges in the field as they relate to recruiting full-time faculty, their expertise and direct experiences with children, recruiting the best and brightest students (Levine, 2006) and field placement issues.

ECTEPs have a critical role to play and need to change to meet the needs of the 21st century teacher. There is an urgent need to:

- Examine both the quality of student teaching experience such as quality of fieldwork placement and substance of instruction (coursework, course syllabi, etc...),
- Focus research on what graduates learned in teacher preparation programs by surveying program graduates and examining teachers' classroom practices and the kind of learning experiences children are benefitting from (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005),
- Promote and support accreditation for ECTEPs,
- Develop strong working relationships with programs that are serving infants and toddlers and explore ways to strengthen the quality of

these settings in order to provide field placement sites (Norris, 2010),

- Address how teacher preparation programs are working towards equipping students to assume an advocacy role for themselves and others and to work with families and become reflective practitioners,
- Invest in more full time faculty with early childhood backgrounds (Horm, Hyson, & Winton, 2013).

Finally, it is not the quantity of teachers that are coming from ECTEPs that will have an impact on children's learning, particularly for infants and toddlers. Rather, it is the quality of those teachers. Without qualified and skilled teachers, the workforce in early childhood will face challenges and the quality of children's learning experiences will be adversely affected.

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