



Research Article

TRAINING CARE-RESPONSIVE SKILLS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STUDENTS

Bui Thi Xuan Lua

Saigon University, Vietnam

Corresponding author: Bui Thi Xuan Lua – Email: btlua@sgu.edu.vn

Received: January 15, 2025; Revised: February 17, 2025; Accepted: March 04, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study identifies the theoretical framework for training care-responsive (CR) skills in early childhood education (ECE) students, focusing on objectives, content, and methods. The aim is to enhance their knowledge, attitudes, and skills in responsive caregiving through university-based learning. Practical activities and practicum in preschools further enhance students' professional capabilities. The findings demonstrate that a systematic, evidence-based, and well-structured training approach enables students to effectively and adaptably master CR skills, aligning with contemporary practical requirements.

Keywords: early childhood education; responsive caregiving; training care skills

1. Introduction

Training professional skills for early childhood education (ECE) students has been affirmed as a top priority for universities offering ECE programs. This task has been implemented in university training programs and has shown initial effectiveness, helping graduates meet job requirements and fulfill their roles in child caregiving at preschools. However, research findings indicate that the training of care-responsive (CR) skills for ECE students has not been adequately addressed, despite numerous studies highlighting the importance of these skills in the professional practice of preschool teachers. Developing CR skills in ECE students is not only a requirement but also a key measure to improve the quality of teacher education programs at universities and enhance the preschool teaching workforce. This paper contributes to the theoretical and practical discussion on CR skills training for ECE students, ultimately aiming to improve the quality of teacher training and the preschool education workforce.

2. Research content

2.1. Key Conceptual Definitions

Cite this article as: Bui, T. X. L. (2025). Training care-responsive skills for early childhood education students. *Ho Chi Minh City University of Education Journal of Science*, 22(3), 557-568. [https://doi.org/10.54607/hcmue.js.22.3.4689\(2025\)](https://doi.org/10.54607/hcmue.js.22.3.4689(2025))

2.1.1. Training

Hoang Phe's Vietnamese Dictionary defines "training" as "practicing repeatedly in real-life situations to achieve solid proficiency and fluency" (Hoang, 2003, p. 826). Dang and Ha (2004) further distinguish training from practice, noting that while practice focuses on procedural mastery, "training must reach a level where the activity becomes personally meaningful to the learner" (p. 108). Collectively, these perspectives characterize training as iterative practice in authentic contexts to foster mastery, flexibility, and creativity in task performance under varying conditions. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes training as the systematic repetition of activities in real-world settings to cultivate robust, meaningful, and effective competencies and skills.

- **Concept of Care-Responsive Skills for Children**

This study defines care-responsive (CR) skills in the context of early childhood education as follows. The term "responsive" (derived from English "reply" and French "réponse") denotes an individual's capacity to react promptly and appropriately during interactions, particularly in response to another's actions or speech (Strelau, 2005). Care responsiveness, a concept prevalent in psychology and information technology, describes a characteristic of individuals or systems marked by swift reactions to stimuli and sensitivity to underlying intentions. In this study, responsiveness is conceptualized as the ability to engage in suitable interactive actions triggered by specific stimuli.

From birth, humans have a strong need to connect with the external world. Ed Tronick's (1970) experiment provides deep insights into how parental responses can influence children's emotional development from infancy—an age at which we might assume they do not yet comprehend emotions. The study also explores what happens when children experience a "disconnection" during interactions with their parents.

John Bowlby's Attachment Theory was the first to describe the bond between parents and infants as a system designed to ensure the caregiver and child remain close for the infant's protection. Infants possess innate signaling abilities, such as crying, to attract and keep caregivers nearby. In response, caregivers react to these signals with varying degrees of urgency.

According to Bowlby (1958, 1969), an attachment relationship is characterized by three key criteria: (1) the child seeks proximity to the attachment figure, particularly during stressful situations; (2) the child derives comfort from the attachment relationship; and (3) the child exhibits distress or protest when the caregiver is absent or fails to demonstrate attachment behaviors.

- **Care-Responsive Skills for Preschool Children**

Care-responsive (CR) caregiving is a fundamental responsibility for preschool teachers in early childhood education, entailing precise responses to children's needs during caregiving interactions. Effective CR caregiving requires teachers to build robust

relationships with children, exhibiting sensitivity to their behaviors and cues while delivering appropriate verbal, nonverbal, and behavioral responses (Ainsworth et al., 1974). Black and Aboud (2011) define CR caregiving as a cornerstone for safeguarding children from injuries, addressing illnesses, enhancing learning, and fostering trust and social bonds (pp. 490-494), emphasizing its role in unlocking children's developmental potential. Similarly, Ainsworth et al. (1974) characterize CR caregiving as a specialized practice that combines sensitivity—teachers' ability to accurately perceive, interpret, and respond to children's cues, needs, and internal states, with stimulation, which involves enriching children's understanding. Preschool teachers enact CR caregiving through developmentally appropriate verbal communication, gestures, and emotional expressions, thereby supporting children's physical and socio-emotional development (Vygotsky, 1980).

Based on the analysis of these concepts, this study defines care-responsive caregiving for preschool children as the ability to accurately and appropriately respond to children's needs and demands during the caregiving process in early childhood settings. Timely responses to children's requests and signals contribute to the development of their nervous system and brain function, enhancing their capacity to positively and effectively receive care from teachers. As a result, children experience continuous physical and personal development.

The above concept highlights that CR caregiving brings positive outcomes for children, including secure attachment to caregivers, emotional regulation, positive social interactions, and cognitive development.

- **Training Care-Responsive Skills for Children**

CR skills in ECE students refer to the application of preschool teachers' knowledge and experience in performing appropriate actions that align with real-life conditions when carrying out CR caregiving tasks. These skills aim to fulfill the objectives set by early childhood education.

From the analysis of the concepts of training, skills, and CR skills for children in early childhood education students, this article defines CR skills training for ECCE students as follows: *CR skills training is the process in which students actively engage in their professional development through both structured training and self-training activities. This process aims to develop CR skills in alignment with the competency requirements outlined in the program's learning outcomes.*

2.2. Objectives, Content, and Methods of Training Care-Responsive Skills for Early Childhood Education Students

2.2.1. Objectives of Training Care-Responsive Skills for Early Childhood Education Students

For ECE students, training in pedagogical skills in general and care-responsive skills with children in particular is of great importance. It is a mandatory activity and a key factor in enhancing the quality of teacher training.

The goal of CR skills training for ECE students is to provide opportunities for them to practice, refine, and develop essential professional skills in early childhood education. Through this training, students recognize the critical role of skill development in their professional growth. This enables them to meet job position requirements after graduation and fulfill the professional competencies expected of preschool teachers according to the Preschool Teacher Professional Standards.

The objectives of CR skills training for ECE students are to strengthen and enhance their knowledge, attitudes, and skills in interacting effectively with individual children and groups through a combination of university coursework, practical activities, and teaching internships in preschools. This training should be conducted in a scientific, planned, and systematic manner to ensure students master CR skills with both flexibility and effectiveness. Additionally, it aims to equip ECE students with the essential competencies required to meet the Preschool Teacher Professional Standards upon graduation.

2.2.2. Content of Training Responsive Caregiving Skills for Early Childhood Education Students

The content of training responsive caregiving skills for individual children and groups of preschool children for ECCE students focuses on the following key aspects:

- **Training CR Planning Skills for Individual Children and Groups in Early Childhood Education**

Planning CR for Individual Children and Groups is the process of designing a comprehensive draft that outlines the expected goals for children, identifies and selects CR content and methods across various aspects, including nutrition care, hygiene, physical health care, and mental health care through responsive interactions in daily play and experiential activities. This planning aims to achieve specific objectives within a defined period.

ECE students must cultivate proficiency in care-responsive (CR) skills by formulating tailored objectives and content for CR plans, selecting appropriate methods, materials, toys, and resources, planning suitable timing and locations, and developing evaluation methods to assess the effectiveness of CR activities, all customized to the developmental needs and progress of specific child groups.

- **Practicing the Skills to Create a Care-Response (CR) Activity Environment for Individual Children and Child Groups in Early Childhood Education**

The educational environment in preschools is a combination of natural and social conditions that directly influence CR activities for individual children and child groups. One of the top priorities for ECE students is to create a child-centered educational environment,

meaning that the design of learning and play spaces, as well as the selection of materials, must be based on children's needs, interests, and abilities. This environment is not only created by teachers but also involves children, with the goal of providing diverse opportunities for them to experience, revisit learned knowledge, and explore through seeing, hearing, and touching. The construction of activity environments for children must adhere to principles such as ensuring safety, fostering aesthetic and creative development, maintaining openness, and encouraging active engagement from children.

In this skill group, ECE students are required to practice and develop the ability to perform key tasks essential to effective CR interactions with different groups of children. These include selecting and effectively combining educational methods tailored to each group, creating a positive classroom atmosphere that stimulates interest and attention based on the specific needs of the children, appropriately using prepared teaching materials and resources during CR activities, and observing children closely to address any pedagogical situations that may arise during the implementation of these activities.

- **Training The Skills to Organize and Implement Care-Response Activities with Individual Children and Groups of Preschool Children**

Organizing and implementing CR activities for individual children and groups of preschool children helps students develop pedagogical skills such as the ability to stimulate and maintain children's interest, interaction skills with children, communication skills, and the ability to use child care materials and tools effectively.

In this skill group, ECE students must practice to develop the ability to perform essential caregiving tasks tailored to the needs of different groups of children. These tasks include organizing meals that align with each group's developmental stage, dietary habits, and physical characteristics; arranging nap times to ensure children sleep deeply, soundly, and safely; and effectively managing hygiene care and health protection in a manner that supports the developmental needs and progress of each group.

- **Training the Skill of Evaluating the Results of Care-Response Activities for Individual Children and Groups of Preschool Children**

The skill of evaluating the results of CR activities for individual children and groups of preschool children in terms of nutrition, hygiene, physical health care, and mental health care is an essential skill that ECE students need to develop during their training at university.

In this skill group, students must be able to carry out essential evaluative tasks related to CR activities with different groups of children. These include assessing the extent to which the objectives and requirements of CR are achieved, evaluating the appropriateness of CR strategies for each group, and making necessary adjustments to the CR plan to better meet the developmental needs and characteristics of the children involved.

2.2.3. Methods for Training Care-Response (CR) Skills with Children for Early Childhood Education (ECE) Students

To help students develop CR skills with individual children and groups, including planning CR activities, creating CR learning environments, implementing CR activities, and assessing CR outcomes, optimal training methods should be applied. These methods include in-class learning within the training program, hands-on practice through professional pedagogical training, and different forms of practicum, such as regular practical exercises and observations for first- and second-year students, as well as teaching internships for third- and fourth-year students. Specifically:

- **Methods for Training CR Skills with Preschool Children Through Learning Modules in the Training Program**

In the first year of the training program, it is essential to adopt specific methods to initially equip students with foundational CR skills for both individual children and groups of preschoolers. These basic skills cover key areas such as nutrition care, hygiene, physical health care, and mental health care. The training process should combine classroom instruction with group discussions, practical exercises, fieldwork, and other interactive activities to promote active learning. Through subject-based learning, lecturers should guide students from theoretical concepts to practical applications by involving them in specific, realistic scenarios. This approach helps students internalize knowledge and translate it into effective CR practices. Consequently, when faced with real-life situations, students will be able to recall and apply specific procedures and actions, independently plan and create appropriate CR learning environments, implement targeted CR activities, and evaluate outcomes related to children's nutrition, hygiene, and physical, and mental well-being.

- **Method of Training Care-Response (CR) Skills for Individual Children and Groups of Preschool Children Through Pedagogical Observation for Second-Year Students**

In their second year, students participate in observation sessions at preschools, where they engage in a range of activities designed to help them become familiar with the professional early childhood education environment. During this phase, students gain valuable insights into the organizational structure of preschools and the specific roles and responsibilities of various staff members involved in the care and education of young children. They observe the daily routines of children at preschool, analyze their observations, and reflect on their experiences. Additionally, students begin to collaborate with preschool teachers in organizing CR activities for children. They explore the psychological and physiological characteristics of preschool children, developing an initial ability to identify challenges in children's cognitive and physical development. As part of their learning process, they are required to submit reports on topics such as the psychological development characteristics of preschool children, growth patterns in height, weight, and motor skills, and the roles and responsibilities of principals, vice principals, and teachers in organizing CR activities in preschools. At this stage, students are expected to attain a basic level of CR

skills. They are capable of performing necessary actions and procedures in a predetermined sequence. However, their skill level remains limited to familiar activities, well-practiced scenarios, and children they have previously interacted with. They have not yet developed the ability to apply CR skills to new contexts, unfamiliar children, or different environmental conditions.

- **Methods for Developing Care-Response Skills with Individual and Group Preschool Children through a Four-Week Teaching Practicum for Third-Year Students**

The content of this practicum focuses on reinforcing students' understanding of the educational setting, the organizational structure of a preschool, and the roles and responsibilities of classroom teachers through direct immersion in the school environment. As part of their teaching practice, students will plan and implement structured learning activities for children based on the educational domains they have previously studied in theory. Concerning homeroom teacher duties, each student is expected to collaborate with the classroom teacher during the practicum to carry out key responsibilities, including organizing daily routines in infant and preschool classes, facilitating play activities, and coordinating class festivals and celebrations.

It can be seen that through all these activities, students' skills in CR for individual children and groups of preschool children—covering aspects such as nutrition, hygiene, physical health care, and mental health care—have been enhanced. Students have acquired these skills at certain levels, with the expected skill proficiency reaching an average level according to the program's learning outcomes. This means that students have independently and proficiently performed the component skills within this skill group in familiar situations, with familiar individual children and groups, and within the familiar preschool environment. However, the ability to transfer these skills to new situations, new children, new groups of children, and new school environments remains limited.

- **Method of Training Care-Response (CR) Skills with Preschool Groups Through an 8-Week Teaching Internship for Fourth-Year Students**

The content of this internship is designed to reinforce students' understanding of the educational landscape, the organizational structure of a preschool, and the roles and responsibilities of classroom teachers through direct immersion in the school setting. In terms of teaching practice, students are expected to organize structured learning activities for children across different age groups. For classroom management practice, each student is required to take the initiative in performing various responsibilities, including organizing daily routines in both infant and preschool classrooms, facilitating play activities in designated learning corners and outdoor areas, and planning and conducting class celebrations.

During this internship, students independently engage in care activities for preschool children, such as nutrition, hygiene, physical health care, and mental well-being. By directly carrying out these care-related tasks, students apply their knowledge, attitudes, and, most importantly, their CR skills with children. They also engage in direct interactions, observe children's behaviors, and employ appropriate methods, tools, and techniques for child care.

2.3. Conditions for Organizing the Training of Care-Response Skills for Early Childhood Education Students During the Training Process

2.3.1. Regarding Learners

Students need to be proactive, active, and self-disciplined in learning and self-studying, cultivating knowledge, attitudes, and skills in child care, nurturing, and education for individual children and groups of children through the preschool education training program at the university.

Students must be able to transform their system of specialized and professional knowledge into competencies during their studies at the university. They should actively participate in official lectures, practical exercises, internships, discussions, lesson observations, and lesson planning (Nguyen, 1995).

2.3.2. Regarding Instructors

Enhancing the responsibility and role of lecturers in methodology courses, as well as leading lecturers in teaching practice and practicum, is essential to improving the quality of student training. The role of the lead lecturer extends beyond coordinating with preschools, finalizing plans, and arranging student placements, it also involves active communication with school administrators and mentor teachers to ensure they clearly understand the objectives, content, and methods of guiding practicum and teaching internships. Moreover, lead lecturers must ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the specific skill sets students are expected to develop and the specific activities that students need to carry out during these experiences.

The lead instructor needs to closely collaborate with the preschool by observing model lessons and student teaching sessions, providing feedback and evaluations on students' organization of practical activities related to child care and education. Additionally, they should discuss and reach a consensus on any discrepancies between the content taught to students and the actual practices at the preschool. This ensures that guiding students during their practicum and teaching internship is truly effective.

2.3.3. Regarding the Training Program

In organizing the development of childcare skills for ECE students, the training program must align with societal needs and evolving practices in early childhood education. To achieve this, the curriculum content and training methods for preschool teachers must be regularly updated, innovated, and improved. The program should enable students to understand and apply practical innovations in the field when selecting methods and

organizing care and educational activities for young children. Methodology courses must clearly define both the theoretical and practical objectives of each subject, ensuring consistency with the overall training goals and expected learning outcomes for ECE students. Additionally, it is important to review and revise the curriculum by supplementing or developing new textbooks that more accurately reflect current realities in early childhood education. Theoretical content should be minimized in favor of practical application, with an increased emphasis on hands-on experiences to help students effectively apply their knowledge in real-world settings. Ultimately, the focus should be on equipping students with the essential knowledge and skills required to fulfill the core responsibilities of a preschool teacher—caring for, nurturing, and educating young children. To support this, the distribution of theoretical and practical learning time in methodology courses should be carefully balanced to ensure students are adequately prepared before engaging in practicum and internship activities.

2.3.4. Regarding Infrastructure

Infrastructure plays a crucial role in organizing effective practical training activities for students in childcare and education at training institutions. Adequate facilities not only support lecturers in delivering high-quality teaching but also help students minimize preparation time for teaching practice. Preschool training institutions should establish model kindergartens to allow students to immerse themselves in the preschool education environment and gain hands-on experience in organizing educational activities for children. Furthermore, the institution should ensure that training rooms are equipped with essential teaching materials, toys, sample records, and various templates. These resources are vital in helping students familiarize themselves with and practice the tools they will use in their theoretical lessons, thereby enhancing their readiness for real-world teaching and caregiving.

2.4. Process of Practicing CR Skills with Children for Early Childhood Education Students

2.4.1. Basis for determining the process of practicing CR skills with children for early childhood education students

To establish the process of practicing CR skills with children for ECE students, several issues are considered. These include the characteristics of modern universities that train ECE students, the current requirements for the qualities and competencies of preschool teachers, and key policy documents such as Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW of the 8th Conference of the 11th Central Committee on the fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education and training. Additionally, the process is guided by professional standards for preschool teachers and regulations on pedagogical training within Early Childhood Education programs. These foundations ensure that the CR skills development process is grounded in both theoretical and practical frameworks that align with national educational goals and the evolving needs of the profession.

2.4.2. *The process of training CR skills for early childhood education students*

The process of training CR skills for students majoring in Early Childhood Education is a scientifically structured sequence of stages, phases, and steps designed to train students to achieve the objectives and requirements of these skills. To develop CR skills with children, individuals must undergo training following a specific process. This process consists of multiple stages.

Kixegof, who organized the skill training process for students, divided this process into five stages of skill formation guidance:

- Stage 1: Students are introduced to how the activity takes place.
- Stage 2: They restate the acquired rules or recall the knowledge that serves as the foundation for skill and technique formation.
- Stage 3: A model of the action is demonstrated.
- Stage 4: Students apply their knowledge to practical activities.
- Stage 5: Students practice through independent and systematic exercises.

According to Geoffrey Petty, to guide students in developing a new skill, the process must be carried out in a sequential manner that suits the learners. He introduced the “EDUCARE?” model, which outlines the steps for teaching skills as follows:

- E (Explanation) - Explanation.
- D (Doing-detail) - Detailed execution.
- U (Use) - Application.
- C (Check and correct) - Verification and correction.
- A (Aide-mémoire) - Memorization.
- R (Review – reuse) - Revision and reuse.
- E (Evaluation) - Assessment.
- ? - Inquiry.

The “EDUCARE?” model by Petty is currently widely applied in many countries for training practical skills for students.

Based on the above perspectives, this paper identifies the process of training CR skills with children for students in Early Childhood Education as consisting of the following stages:

- Stage 1: The teacher organizes and guides students to fully understand the purpose, content, conditions, and methods of performing specific actions in CR skills with children.
- Stage 2: The teacher organizes for students to actively practice and train CR skills with children, from simple to advanced levels, through various training pathways.
- Stage 3: The teacher organizes for students to evaluate and recognize the results of training CR skills with children and develop a plan to continue practicing and improving CR skills with children.

3. Conclusion

Each child has unique physical, intellectual, familial, and socio-cultural characteristics, and different levels of development. Therefore, ECE students must possess skills in child care and education (CCED). When students apply methods of CCED that are suited to the characteristics of the child, the child's level of comprehension, age group, and cultural and gender needs, it will serve as an intermediary factor in developing important brain regions and promoting adaptive development in children. Children will be supported in continuously developing from their "current development zone" to their "proximal development zone," bringing long-term benefits, including improved learning abilities and academic performance in school and later in life. However, the success of CCED in preschool education depends on how students master skills in this area. For students to acquire the professional skills, specifically those related to CCED in alignment with social needs, it is an urgent issue for universities offering early childhood education programs. However, current training for students still faces several challenges and limitations, such as the need to equip students with deep professional knowledge and flexible, proficient practical skills in ECE. This requires universities to place greater emphasis on developing the curriculum, enhancing practical teaching content, and ensuring that practical learning time is closely linked to real-life applications. This article presents the goals, content, methods, and processes for developing professional skills to contribute to the training of early childhood education students who are knowledgeable and skilled in meeting the current societal demands of child care and education.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.

REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Bell, S. M., & Stayton, D. J. (1974). Infant-mother attachment and social development: 'Socialization' as a product of reciprocal responsiveness to signals. In *M. P. M. Richards (Ed.), The integration of a child into a social world* (pp. 99-135). Cambridge University Press.
- Black, M. M., & Aboud, F. E. (2011). Responsive feeding is embedded in a theoretical framework of responsive parenting. *Journal of Nutrition*, 141(3), 490-494. <https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.110.129973>
- Hoang, P. (2003). *Từ điển tiếng Việt [Vietnamese dictionary]*. Hong Duc Publishing House.
- Nguyen, H. D. (1995). *Hình thành kỹ năng sư phạm cho sinh viên sư phạm [Forming pedagogical skills for pedagogical students]*. Education Publishing House.

- Trinh, N. T. (2009). *Developing content and processes for training pedagogical skills according to professional standards for students majoring in Early Childhood Education through regular pedagogical training activities and internships offense*. Ministerial-level project.
- Tronik, E. (1970). *The Neurobehavioral and Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Children*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1980). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
-

**RÈN LUYỆN KĨ NĂNG CHĂM SÓC ĐÁP ỨNG VỚI TRẺ CHO SINH VIÊN
NGÀNH GIÁO DỤC MẦM NON**

Bùi Thị Xuân Lua

Trường Đại học Sài Gòn, Việt Nam

Tác giả liên hệ: Bùi Thị Xuân Lua – Email: btxlua@sgu.edu.vn

Ngày nhận bài: 15-01-2025; ngày nhận bài sửa: 17-02-2025; Ngày duyệt đăng: 04-3-2025

TÓM TẮT

Bài viết này nghiên cứu về mục tiêu, nội dung, phương pháp rèn luyện kĩ năng chăm sóc đáp ứng (CSDU) với trẻ cho sinh viên (SV) ngành giáo dục mầm non (GDMN), nhằm củng cố, bổ sung kiến thức, thái độ, kĩ năng về CSDU với trẻ thông qua quá trình học tập tại trường đại học. Bên cạnh đó, hoạt động thực tế, thực tập sư phạm ở trường mầm non cũng góp phần rèn luyện kĩ năng thực hành nghề nghiệp cho SV. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy việc rèn luyện kĩ năng CSDU với trẻ mầm non cho SV được thực hiện một cách khoa học, có kế hoạch và có hệ thống sẽ giúp SV có được kĩ năng CSDU với trẻ một cách thuần thục, linh hoạt, phù hợp với điều kiện thực tiễn hiện nay.

Từ khóa: giáo dục mầm non; chăm sóc đáp ứng với trẻ; rèn luyện kĩ năng chăm sóc