

The Use of E-Learning Technologies in Foster Parent Training Programs

Abstract

According to national monitoring and individual scientific studies, there is an increasing number of orphans and children left without parental care worldwide. The urgent need of pre-service foster parent training in many countries including Russia and Afghanistan is recognized at the professional. Qualified foster parent training is necessary for work with children without parental care who have the experience of living in institutions. The lack of qualified training leads to conflicts, misunderstandings, severe traumatization of children, and "secondary" social orphan hood. Foster parent training also reduces the risk of returning children from foster care to institutions and helps to improve the efficiency of social adaptation of all family members. Foster parent training methods vary widely within the country. The remote training is conducted solely by posting information on the web-site of the organization, the use of tutorials, videos and audio materials. The interviews of foster parents (n = 74), mostly mothers (92.0 %), confirmed the effectiveness of using multimedia and its positive impact on increasing the level of foster parents training, especially in rural areas where foster parents can

have an access to different kinds of professionals, such as psychologists, social workers, practitioners, etc. via Internet resources, as well as they can create a virtual group of supporters where discuss the most important issues concerning the upbringing of foster children and the methods of communication with their biological parents. The use of e-learning technologies will contribute to the development of pedagogical and educational skills of foster parents, as well as promote the policy of deinstitutionalization of orphan hood in the Russian Federation and Afghanistan.

Introduction

Children entering foster care usually have serious physical, behavioral and emotional problems. Some researchers claim that foster parents with low or no specialized professional training face to unexpected externalizing behavior problems exhibited by majority of foster children such as anger, set fires, lie, steal, cruelty to animals and smaller children, severe eating disorders and inappropriate sexual behavior (Cruse, Lekies, Stockdale, Moorman, Baum, Yates, Gillis-Arnold & Riggins-Caspers, 2000; Dekovic, Asscher, Hermanns, Reitz, Prinzie&Akker, 2010; Dozier, Lindehiem, Lewis, Bick, Bernard, & Peloso, 2009; Gavita, David, Bujorenu, Tiba&Ionutiu, 2012).

Research studies have demonstrated the great impact of foster parent training on improving parent attitudes, parent-child interactions, and reduction of child behavior problem which can increase the stability of placement of foster children themselves as

well as foster parent retention (Puddy&Jackson, 2003; Raikes&Thompson, 2008).

The urgent need of pre-service foster parent training in Russia is recognized at the professional level of academics, practitioners, and foster parents themselves. In Afghanistan, due to war conflicts many children including orphans are behind school studies and need a qualified foster parent training. (Dozier, Lindehiem, Lewis, Bick, Bernard & Peloso, 2009). The lack of qualified training as well as the lack of preparation of orphans themselves to the conditions of the foster family leads to conflicts, misunderstandings, severe traumatization of children, and “secondary” social orphan hood.

Foster parent training reduces the risk of returning children from foster care to institutions and helps the improvement of efficiency in social adaptation of all family members (Ben-Porath, 2010). Foster parent training encourages the willingness of the parties to change the old system, such as norms and rules of conduct, in order to eliminate conflicts, adjust the level of mutual expectations, reduce feelings of insecurity of foster parents and build the constructive parent-child relationship.

In Russia, the issue of foster parent training has been the subject of discussion, recently. Over the past decade, many gaps in Russian legislation system regarding foster parent training were eliminated and Federal laws, regulations of the Government and the Ministry of Education and Science were developed. It began in 2009 with the adoption of the Resolution of

the Government of the Russian Federation “On some issues of guardianship for minors”, in which the rules of selection, registration and the procedure of training citizens who wish to become guardians or foster parent have been prescribed. According to the Federal Law, a person who does not have a certificate of complete training cannot be foster or an adoptive parent. The exception is made for close relatives and individuals who were or are the guardians of children who have not been suspended from their duties.

In Russia, an organization providing pre-service foster parent training is assigned to the child welfare authorities, in some cases the right can be given to educational and medical institutions and organizations which provide social services, including organizations for orphans and children left without parental care on the basis of a contract concluded with the child welfare authorities (for example, on the basis of children's homes, rehabilitation centers, centers for children without parental care).

In Afghanistan, after the fall of Taliban regime, afghan government took some measures to help the orphans and the children who were above school age and were not able to go to school in 2001, and created a project “ Afghan Primary Education Program” with accelerated education for those whose age were above school age. Indeed it was a training program to help them become literate and be able to enter high schools. This program was active for 3 years and had graduated around 200000 children.

It worth to mention that Afghanistan still needs such training programs to train foster parents, orphans and other children without parental care.

Given the information, the following questions motivated the paper: What is the current situation of foster parent training program? What problems interrupt this process? Does technology play important role in accelerating the process?

The main objective of this paper is; to discuss the advantages of using e-learning technology in foster parent training and to point out the obstacles and disadvantages accompanied with the process at the time.

Data and Methodology

In order to evaluate the attitude of prospective foster parent to information technologies using in training programs, we have made a research (in-depth interviews) in Saratov and Belgorod regions. The initial sample included 74 foster parents (92.5 % of the original 80) who were engaged in training for at least three weeks. Ninety two percent of the interviews were held with foster mothers, 8.0 % were held with both parents. Participation in the research was voluntary. No solicitation or incentives were provided by the social service agencies for foster parents to participate in the study. The majority of participants were married (85.0 %), the rest were unmarried or had cohabiting relationships. All foster parents were interviewed in the organization where they were taking pre-service foster parent training program. The interviews were structured around the

questions, but the researchers were given the freedom to explore new lines of the issue. Each interview took from 60 minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the background of the respondents. One third of the participants did not live at the same place where they took a foster parent training program.

Empirical Results

Pre-service foster parent training is free of charge for candidates, and it is funded from equity institutions, extra-budgetary funds, other legitimate sources, as well as the regional budgets of the Russian Federation (On approval of the model program, 2011). The main objects of pre-service foster parent training are: (1) to take care of orphans and children left without parental care; (2) to form their educational and parenting skills for the maintenance of foster children's education, including the protection of their rights and interests, the creation of a safe environment, providing successful socialization, education and development; (3) to make prospective parents determine their readiness to take foster children in their family, choosing forms of placement, paying attention to real problems and challenges they face with; (4) to acquaint candidates with the basics of the law in order to protect foster children's rights and responsibilities for foster parents.

In accordance with the Family Code of the Russian Federation, the program and the procedure for foster parent training are made by the executive authorities of the Russian Federation, which are required to be

trained on the principles of regularity, accessibility, appropriateness. Enforcement authorities determine the contents of the sections and the complexity of the program, the requirements for different levels of pre-service foster parent training, the forms and methods of training. However, under the Federal Law, the overall complexity of the program must be no less than 5 days and no more than 180 days (and at least 70.0 % must be given on practical training, including the final examination) (On approval of the organization, 2015). It should last no more than three months and the waiting time for the start of the training program will not exceed 30 days (On approval of the model program, 2011).

According to the statistic of Saratov region, the number of foster parents who have been trained and got a certificate increase annually (Table. 1).

In Russia, the enrollment of candidates to attend training courses carried out by a written request, on the basis of voluntary participation and the possibility of self-selection of the organization in the entity of the Russian Federation, regardless of their place of residence. The foster parent training may be provided by social workers, lawyers, psychologists, practitioners, with close cooperation with experienced foster parents.

Table. 1 – The number of candidates, participating in foster parent training program (person /per year)

Year	Total number of trained parents	Public and kinship care	Foster care	Successful training (certificate)	Unsuccessful training (no certificate)
2010	17	15	2	15	-
2011	39	21	18	38	1
2012	75	29	41	66	4
2013	88	53	35	86	2
2014	87	46	41	84	3
2015	85	54	31	81	4
2016	78	52	26	75	3

Source: Survey conducted by authors

The program ends with final certification and issuance of certificate of participation in this training, which is represented to the child welfare authorities, and in the case of adoption of a child in court. It should be noted that, in contrast to European and American standards, the validity of the certificate is not installed by Russian law.

Pre-servicing foster parent training is organized in full-time and part-time forms, with distance education methods, including group work (the number of participants should not exceed 15 persons), as well as individual training (On approval of the organization, 2015).

The most effective distance education methods are videos, themed movies, cartoons, short stories regarding how to solve the mystery of adoption; the child's development in early stages; child abuse; child adaptation in the family, etc. One of the main factors of learning by using video is that every foster parent can create his/her own video to share the experience of solving typical problems based on real life events.

Audio materials (for example, audio books) are an indispensable tool for potential foster parents, especially who are taking part-time programs. Advantages of using audio materials are the following: they can influence the feelings and attitudes of listeners; acquaint foster parents with the information of those who do not want to read, or the circumstances of their lives do not allow them to use printed materials and videos; provide better and more detailed understanding of educational information.

Photographs are used as stimulus materials for illustrating tasks at different levels of training. The control tasks (tests) help to monitor and evaluate the level of foster parent's knowledge and skills during the program.

Consultation meetings with the trainers and other specialists take place through webinars, Skype, as well as communication in social networks (chats, forums, e-mails, etc.). They contribute to the improvement and implementation of foster parents training programs; provide an opportunity to share ideas, results and methods of solving problems with

the experts and other participants, as well as to obtain an additional information, assistance or approval.

The survey confirmed the effectiveness of multimedia and its positive impact on increasing the level of foster parents training. More than 87.0% of the respondents expressed positive attitude towards the use of information technologies in their training. According to the respondents' answers, the main advantages of the use of distance education methods were the following: (1) time saving, because some organizations provide training on weekdays during office hours from 9 to 5 p.m., in spite of the law to carry out training in the evenings, weekends or holidays; (2) receiving education without interrupting work hours or family duties (in candidates' opinions in some cases they had to take a leave in order to get training certificate in time); (3) the lack of foster parent training programs in the place they lived in (in some cases candidates had to travel 150 km weekly to participate in the program); (4) savings (high fare in a suburban and railway transport for low income population, especially from rural areas); (5) no strict timing frames, that allow foster parents to collect other documents simultaneously, without any delays, otherwise respondents had to wait for a long time to join the group, that led to the expiration of previously collected documents; (6) the participation of people from any region of the country.

Among barriers which hinder the development of foster care system in the country, it should be mentioned: (1) the lack of interest of the guardianship

authorities (according to the interviews, in some cases they themselves set the number of hours of training program (usually 72 hours), in spite of the law (not less than 5 and not more than 180 days) as well as give preference to one model of the certificate, taken in a particular organization; (2) there is no national standards regarding the uniform set of practical tasks as well as recommended video and audio materials for foster parent training programs; (3) there is no strict demands to the specialists' qualification who use information technologies in training.

How electronic technology is used for foster training of students and their parents in Afghanistan?

Educational technology is the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological processes and resources.

Educational technology is the use of both physical hardware and educational theoretic. It encompasses several domains, including learning theory, computer-based training, online learning, and, where mobile technologies are used.

Having in mind, in the 21th century it is impossible to pursue learning process without using technologies. Therefore, during the last decade, government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has taken some useful measures to mobilize students and encourage their parents to use electronic technologies like computers, printers, copiers, internet, camera and

other important technological equipment to speedup training and learning.

For some schools in Kabul and other provincial centers, there are equipped computer rooms. Computer science is added to school curriculum as a subject for 4th class and above. About 80% of Kabul and other cities have access to computers and other tools of communication and even most of the people have computer in their houses; therefore parents can help their children to use technologies for boosting the outcome of their learning.

. According to the schools' plans and obligatory protocols, parents are supposed to help the students do their home works on time and better including computer learning.

Important measure taken toward technological education in Afghanistan is the establishment of computer science department at Kabul University in 1996 and 12 years later in 2008, the department was promoted to faculty level.

The faculty has started learning process with three departments namely software engineering, information system and technology and database in 2010.

Students interested in studying electronic technology can use computer rooms at schools and universities

Some parents consider buying a tablet, laptop or other digital device for their children.

Schools are also responsible for making sure all children in their school can participate in digital learning opportunities at school if they can't bring their own device.

Access to the internet can also be useful for online technological learning for students in Afghanistan. Currently, the use of internet is expanding in the country and almost all telecommunication companies provide internet services in competing price. This further insures the use of technology and other telecommunication tools, countrywide.

Digital technologies can have many positive impacts on learning and offer challenging activities and opportunities for real world problem-solving activities.

We have to mention that during the last decade, Afghan students have accessed to a wide range of technological tools. For example, more than 90% of university students have access to communicational and informational technology in Afghanistan.

We hope that in the near future afghan youths will be able to stand in line with other students of region and world for using educational technologies.

Conclusion

From the above, the foster care for orphans and children left without parental care as an alternative to institutions should be seen as a priority of the state family policy which varies widely through the country. Candidates choose to foster because they find some pleasure in parenting and they want to improve children's lives.

Appropriate foster parent training program will help foster parents to do a better job for the children to reduce risk factors such as the secondary abandonment, deviant behavior, mental health problems, etc.; to establish constructive parent-child relationships, to contribute to foster children's personal growth and development.

Using distance education methods in foster parent training programs can help to develop new types of social services for different categories of families. Due to the lack of time, transportation, especially for foster parents living in rural areas, the additional multimedia teaching resources can help them to get acquainted with the update information, materials, to implement methods and techniques of interaction with foster children, their biological parents, and professionals in their personal experience.

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