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ROLE OF PRE-SCHOOL CENTRES IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to assess the nature of preschool education imparted at preschool centres. The sample comprised 60 preschool teachers from four districts of Kashmir division. All teachers were selected by a combination of random and purposive sampling technique. The data was collected with the help of self-devised interview schedule. The result reveal that majority of the preschool centres though being run in rented accommodation had all the basic amenities . The preschools followed fixed syllabus and used both formal and play way method to impart preschool education to develop curriculum skills among children. Results also indicate that majority of the centres devoted 5 hours daily to preschool education and this included indoor and outdoor activities . Children were engaged in group and individual based activities to develop various qualities and skills . Results also elucidate that children were involved in various developmental activities . Commonly conducted ECD activities included storytelling, free conversation, rhymes, puzzles and blocks, drawing and indoor and outdoor activities.

Introduction

Children in India form a large and significant percentage of total population .The development of children are the first priority on the country's development agenda, not because they are the most vulnerable but because they our supreme assets of nation (Murlidharan,1990). The preschool years of child life are globally acknowledged to be most critical years for lifelong development since the pace of development in these years is extremely rapid these early years. Foundations for the inculcation of social values and personal habits which are known to last time are laid here. Children enter their preschool years with a significant background of learning experience with their family and surroundings (Saini etal, 1993). What follows logically is the crucial importance of investing in these early years to ensure an enabling environment for every child and there by sound foundation for life which is not only the right of every child, but will also

impact in the longer term (Ackerman, 2006). Preschool education is therefore an integral part of child rearing experience provided by any agency for all children. One of the provider of preschool education in India are preschool centers that, are also known by, nursery, kindergarten, shishu vihar etc (Upadhay,1999).Preschool education is an important step in the direction for the promotion of Childs growth. Preschool is the childs first step towards organized care and learning in the larger society. It provides major influence on the development of childs intellectual capacities, interpersonal skills, social behavior and personality (Shabnam, 2003). Preschool centers are proved best place for the children to gain the basic lessons of life. The children come across several learning and play activities. These centers help the children to overcome separation anxiety and the continuous communication with other children helps to improve language and vocabulary skills(Gupta, 2007. The

vital contribution of preschool centers lies in developing and broadening the range of children learning experience to leave them confident, eager and enthusiastic learner who are looking forward to school(Shabnam, 2003) Quality preschool education can have substantial positive effect for the children who attend, easing the transition to school and providing a boost to a child's self esteem as well as their future scholastic ability(Nicholas 2007) Children with richer literacy environment demonstrate higher level of reading knowledge and skills at preschool entry(Nord and Lennon, 2002). Environmental stimulation through preschool education gives children a better start in life and thus gives a better chance of higher achievement in later life. This necessitates provision of good facilities for education outside home in the form of preschool education(Murlidharan, 1984). Children with quality preschool experience attained significantly higher scores in pre reading, early number and develop various concepts which lay foundation for formal education(Sylva, 2004). Early childhood education is a vital component of the development of the young children and investment in such programs can go a long way to support the development of good citizen for the future and thus the preschool centres has become every parents concern especially in the context of its crucial role in Child's all round development and access to elementary education(Samuel, 1995).

Research Methodology : The methodological and sampling framework for the present study is as under.

Sample Technique: The sample for the present study comprised 60 preschool teachers selected from four districts of Kashmir division. Four districts were selected randomly from a total of ten districts, by lottery method. From each district 15 preschool centres were selected randomly and from each preschool one teacher was selected purposively to know the nature of preschool education imparted at preschool centre. Sample was selected through the use of random and purposive sampling technique.

Research Instrument: The tools used for data gathering in the present study was a self-devised interview schedule. Both open and close ended questions were included and the schedule was pretested on a sample

of 20 preschool teachers. After preliminary analysis certain alteration were made and some more questions about preschool education and its related aspects were included so as to get in-depth information and assess the actual functioning of preschool centre's with regard to nature and quality of education imparted.

Data Analysis: The data was analyzed through content analysis. Tabulation and calculation of percentages was also carried out.

Results and Discussion : The results are presented as under:

The above table reveals that majority of the preschools (55%) were running in rented building where as 35% were housed on their own setup. 38% of centers had four rooms for the children with abundant indoor space to learn and play freely and rest of the schools had a provision of more than four rooms. The gathered verbal and written data elucidate that majority of the rooms of the preschool had 12x14" floor area and children were accommodated as per the space of room to get individual attention and develop positive interaction between teacher and peer group. Majority of the preschools had good ventilation and light arrangement in the classroom. The appearance of physical surrounding invited the children to learn and create interest in day to day activities. 45% of preschools had constructed doors and windows according to height of children. Majority of the centers had carpeted floor to make the classroom environment cozier and attractive. Wooden furniture was provided to chil-

dren with emphasis given to height and age so that it would help them to visualize the things properly and had less chance of physical falls. It was seen by the investigator and also in gathered data that majority of the preschools (66.6%) had a provision of separate activity room where the children were engaged in different types of activities and in fun loving games.

2:AMENITIES AT PRESCHOOL CENTRE

Table 2 FACILITIES AVAILABLE IN THE CENTRE

washroom	Number of preschools	Percentage (%)
One	21	35
Two	23	38.3
More than two	16	26.6
Total	60	100
Toilet		
One	6	10
Two	41	68.3
More than two	13	21.6
Total	60	100
Fan facility		
Yes	45	75
No	15	25
Total	60	100
Heating		
Yes	40	66.6
No	20	33.3
Total	60	100
Play ground		
Yes	58	96.6
No	2	3.3
Total	60	100

It is seen from the above data that maximum number of preschools (38.3%) had two washrooms for the children where as the toilet facility were concerned 41% of the centers had two flush available. Majority of the preschools had a provision of fan in a classroom and as far as the heating arrangement were concerned 66.6% had this facility where as remaining number were deprived of this amenity. The data from the above table also indicates that majority of the schools (96.6%) had playground facility for the children where they were involved in different types of games and physical activities. It is concluded from the above results that preschool centers were fully equipped with all the basic amenities which plays an important part in physical setup and also for child's daily needs

3: Implementation of Syllabus

Table 3 REASONS BEHIND IMPLEMENTATION OF SYLLABUS

REASONS	NUMBER OF TEACHERS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Develop scholastic skills	18	30
To enhance level of understanding	8	13.3
To stimulate intellectual capacities	4	6.6
Preparation of formal schooling	12	20
To develop over all personality	18	30
Total	60	100

According to the written and verbal data gathered from the teachers it was found that all the preschool centers followed proper syllabus to develop the curriculum skills among children. The data from the above table indicates that the teachers mentioned different reasons regarding following of syllabus. Majority of them (30%) the application of syllabus at preschool would help a children to develop and learn literacy skills and other concepts that gives them better head start. Same percentage of teachers' i-e 30% reasoned out that when children are taught through a fixed syllabus it has a positive affect on their wholesome growth and development. Whereas remaining number pointed out that level of understanding and intellectual capacities of children get enhanced when they experienced and learnt different things by planned activities and curriculum and rest of the teachers mentioned when children are better equipped during preschool years it helps them to get easy entrance into formal education. The preschool staff emphasized on all the areas of development when they framed out the syllabus. Teachers also reported that when appropriate curriculum are planned out it would help foster self understanding among children as their capabilities, interest abilities were reinforced by given opportunities and age-related activities.

4:AVAILABILITY OF BOOKS AT PRESCHOOL CENTRE :

The gathered written and verbal data revealed that majority of the preschools provide books to children to make the learning easier for them and also supported in their language experience by read-

ing different types of books I-e alphabetical, story, numerical, picture etc. With help of these books children were able to developed concentration and can understand and differentiate things easily and also derived enjoyment out of it.

5: INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES : It was found from the gathered data and also observed by the investigator that majority of the teachers 66.6% involved the children in combined activities i-e group and individual based activities in concern to enhance the social behavior and ability to perform the task individually. Majority of the teachers mentioned that when children were engaged in both form of activities they got an opportunity to develop various qualities and skills. They become social when they participated in a group and cultivated sharing habits. By continuous interaction with the peer group it helped them to enhance communication skill. Teachers also reasoned out that the engagement of children in individual activities helped them o buildup confidence and develop creativity.

6: AVERAGE TIME SPENT FOR PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AT PRESCHOOL : It was found from the gathered data that majority of the preschools 45% spent two hours for preschool education like counting, reading of alphabets, numerals, rhymes, concept of color, shape , size, chart reading which include fruits, vegetables, transportation, parts of body, good and bad habits and three hours spent to play indoors and out door games. But it was observed by the investigator that children were mostly busy learning literacy skills and other concepts and got less time to play physical activities. These findings are supported with the results of a study conducted by Allen (1993) as at preschool centres children are usually seen busy learning 3Rs of formal education and not spending time on other activities. The busy daily routine did not permit the child to play, enjoy simple pleasures and to explore the surrounding. The teacher used both Hindi and English medium to impart preschool education to children so they can adjust themselves better in later years. Early education was imparted through the use of different types of teaching aids like black board, charts, books, puzzles matching objects, blocks, A-V aids, fixing pairing objects etc. Children developed various concepts when they used all such aids

like counting colors big and small shape weight, alphabet and numeral experience, and also learnt identification, differentiation and classification skill. It was observed by the investigator that children showed more interest in learning and get easily motivated when they used all such aids by themselves. Learning through manipulative made the children curious to explore and showed more excitement when they were taught through A-V aids. According to the verbal and written data gathered from the teachers it was found that preschools monitored the syllabus so to assess whether the topics and activities which was designed for the children were appropriate and beneficial to cater to their developmental needs.

7: DEVELOPMENTAL BASED

Table 4 DEVELOPMENTAL BASED ACTIVITIES

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It is evident from the above data that majority of the preschools (48%) conducted all the cognitive related activities i-e sorting, blocks ,self- selected activities, seriation and counting etc.The involvement of children in these activities helped to develop the ability to classify and know the relationship of objects.They buildup confidence to made choices when they were engaged in self-selected activities. The arrangement of all such activities helped to facilitate optimal cognitive development among children.41.6% preschool centre’s conducted various activities to promote language development i-e picture reading, describing objects, story narration, naming and identification of pictures. To enhance the fine – muscle co-ordination among children majority of the centre’s 43.3% involved the children in two related activities I-e matching objects and puzzles. As far as the creative development were concerned majority of the centers 45% conducted only one activity on a regular basis, I-e drawing. It is concluded from the above results that preschool centers provided abundant opportunities to involve the children in developmental based activities and had provision of all types of teaching material which would help to support all areas of development in a proper manner.

8:ACTIVITIESATPRESCHOOLCENTRES

Table 5 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED AT PRESCHOOL CENTRES

Activities	Number of preschools	Percentage (%)
Storytelling and free conversation		
Counting and rhymes		
Puzzles and blocks		
Drawing		
Indoor and outdoor games		
Combination of 1 and 2	10	16.6
Combination of 1,2 ,4, and 5	7	11.6
Combination of 2 ,4, and 5	4	6.6
All of the above	39	65
Total	60	100

It was found from table 5 that majority of the preschool centres 65% conducted all the ECD activities to encompass all areas of development. According to the verbal and written data gathered from the teachers they mentioned that children improved their

vocabulary skills when they were engaged in storytelling, free conversation, songs and rhymes recitation. These activities would help them to participate and speak fluently without any hesitation. The preschool teacher also added up that playing of children with manipulative for example, puzzles, blocks, matching objects, counting ring and involvement in indoor and outdoor activities helps to reinforced the concepts and enhance fine- large muscle coordination among children.

Conclusion : Children are the most important asset of a nation so they need conducive and congenial environment to develop into good citizen.Preschool years constitutes the most critical period of Childs life when the foundation are laid for cognitive, social, emotional, physical, motor development and cumulative lifelong learning. Preschool education plays a significant role in complete growth and all round development of the child. The term preschool education includes such programmes as nursery schools, day care or kindergarten. All these serve children before entry into primary school (Bowman, 2003). Good early child hood programmes can enhance child's ability to learn, to communicate ideas and feelings and get along with others. Children who attend quality preschool programmes are more likely to succeed in school and in life and a provision of good quality education is a key to Child's future success(Sander, 2003).The present study indicates that majority of the preschools were housed in a rented building with abundant room facilities where the children sat comfortably and indulged into various activities. It was found from the gathered data that all preschool centers were fully equipped with all the basic amenities which played an important part in a physical setup and also for the child's daily needs. Preschools mostly followed fixed syllabus to develop curriculum skills among children. Findings are supported with the findings conducted by Elliot (2004) when children are taught through balanced and fixed curriculum ,they also develop academic and social behavioral development and also showed greatest learning gains. The duration given to activities was totally flexible so the children got enough time to learn and absorb things at their own pace. The preschool authorities’ emphasis on all areas of development when they frame out the syllabus so

to foster the capabilities and interest of children by given opportunities and age-related activities. The study also reveals that all the preschools had the provision of books to make the learning easier for children and develop better concentration. Findings also depict that centre's spent 5 hours duration to preschool education that include early literacy skills, indoor and outdoor activities but it was observed by the investigator that children were mostly busy with reading, writing, playing indoor games and got less time for physical activities. Children were engaged both in group and individual activities to become social by getting along with each other, develop creativity and buildup confidence to finish the activity individually. The present study also reveals that preschools conducted various developmental based activities which could help to enhance cognitive, language, fine-muscle and creative development among children. Findings are corroborated with the findings of the study conducted by Melhuish (2004) that involvement of children in various activities at preschool helps to improve cognitive abilities, vocabulary skills and get along better with the peer group through continuous communication. Playway and formal method was ap-

plied to impart preschool education to children so that they learned and retained things easily. It was found from the gathered data that majority of the preschool centre's conducted number of ECD activities in a regular manner for example, storytelling, free conversation, counting, rhymes, puzzles and blocks, drawing indoor and outdoor games to encompasses all areas of development.

Suggestions :

- Ø Preschool centres should be staffed with trained teachers to cater the developmental needs of children.
- Ø Teacher and parents must be aware about the importances of play way approach in early education so that equal emphasis on both the methods is maintained.
- Ø The time duration for early childhood education activities must be increased so that children get enough time to play and exploration.
- Ø The school authorities must put emphasis to conduct regular parent teacher meeting on time so that parents came to know the day to day progress of the child.

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