

Preschool Curriculum and Its Implementation in Urban and Rural Areas

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum may be explained as what happens in the classroom or laboratory and it must be relevant to the developing child's needs and abilities, both today and tomorrow. The curriculum should provide opportunities for healthy social, emotional, physical and intellectual development besides intellectual and cognitive growth (Jenkins, 1986). Thus, curriculum is all of the organized educational experiences provided for children by the early childhood programme. A truly integrated curriculum results in a day that smoothly, providing many opportunities for children to learn in all the developmental areas, allowing for individual differences in learning styles and rates, and encouraging creativity through a variety of play experiences (Catran and Allen, 1993).

It learning is to be integrated and purposeful for the child, the approaches for curriculum design must incorporate developmental differences with in a child centered on child initiated approach. Bruchfield (1992) stated that teacher must be given opportunities to develop implemented and evaluate developmentally appropriate curricular and instructional strategies that go beyond the traditional high middle low group way of looking at organizing and learning the children in their classroom communication.

METHODOLOGY

Study was conducted in purposively selected state of Haryana and union territory of Chandigarh. Multistage sampling technique was used. Pre and primary sections were selected purposively from rural urban and peri-urban areas of Hisar district and Chandigarh. Two preschool laboratories were taken from the Department of HDFS, CCS HAU, Hisar and other lab. nursery school from Government Girls College, Chandigarh run by the Department of Child Development were also selected purposively. Further seven schools from each cultural settings i.e. rural, peri-urban area were

selected randomly from both places – Hisar and Chandigarh. Sample from urban areas is consisted of fourteen schools, seven from private and equal number from public sector were taken randomly. To gather information principal and school teachers were interviewed to know about teaching strategies. Data were collected through interview schedule and observation check-list developed by Bhatnagar and Chhikara (2001). Descriptive analysis was used to draw inferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 exhibits the whole picture of the status of educational programme for young children in accordance with different components. As far as general curriculum is concerned, it can be seen that 100 per cent schools of all cultural setting were having curriculum which was based on goals. It was found that almost all the schools reported that their main goal of curriculum was to educate the children and make them good human beings. Some of them told that goal of curriculum was to impart knowledge to children for their all round development. In both the preschool labs, curriculum was also based on goals.

On the other hand, observations done by the researcher reflected a different image. Most of the schools did not cover all the aspects of development and main emphasis was on 3 R's, reading, writing and arithmetic. It was also felt by the researcher that even administrators and teachers were not aware about goals and objectives of over all development of children.

Reported data of present investigation, observed that the staff of the schools had knowledge that curriculum should be based on some goals but they are not aware about what type of goals and not bothered about achieving those goals.

Data according to the cultural settings, also showed that 100 per cent urban private schools had some philosophy while 92.85 per cent rural schools, 100 urban govt. and 78.57 peri-urban schools were having some philosophy based curriculum. Both the preschool labs of Hisar and

Chandigarh reported that the curriculum was philosophy based. Results of made by researcher observation reflected that the teachers of very few schools except labs know the term philosophy and they did not follow any philosophy given by different educators but actually they were running the programs in a way they desired.

Area-wise results depicted that all the urban govt. schools were following play way method in comparison to Montessori philosophy. Play way method was followed in 92.85 per cent urban private, 64.28 per cent peri-urban and 92.85 per cent rural schools where as montessori philosophy was followed in 7.14 per cent urban private, 14.28 per cent peri-urban schools only. On the other hand 21.42 per cent peri-urban and 7.14 per cent rural schools were not aware about the philosophy. It was also revealed that both the preschool labs were following play way method (Table 1).

On the contrary, researcher's observation revealed that a few government pre-schools of

Chandigarh and few private urban schools in Hisar and Chandigarh were following play way method. Teachers were teaching 3 R's to the children and children were even not allowed to go out from the classroom and were also not allowed to talk with each other. It was also observed that schools which reported teaching with Montessori philosophy were not using the Montessori equipment and materials in the classroom activities. Interestingly they do not have any idea about montessori's philosophy and also were not trained for montessori's methods.

The pre-school program should be child centered which caters to the needs, abilities and interests of the young children and it should be child oriented and not subject centered, as subjects are varied and children are not ready to grasp different subjects easily.

The observation made by the researcher indicated that most of the schools were having subject centered programs. Teachers of pre-school just want to complete their prescribed

Table 1: Existing status of educational programmes for young children regarding curriculum

| S. Aspects No. | Hisar (Haryana). N=29 | U.T. Chandigarh N=29 | Grand total N=58 |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Goal based | 29 (100) | 29(100) | 58 (100) |
| 2. Philosophy based | 27(93.10) | 27(93.10) | 54(93.10) |
| 3. Type of Philosophy | | | |
| a. Montessori | 2(6.89) | 1 (3.44) | 3 (5.17) |
| b. Play way | 25 (86.20) | 26 (89.65) | 51 (87.93) |
| c. Not aware | 2 (6.89) | 2 (6.89) | 4 (6.89) |
| d. No philosophy | - | - | - |
| 4. Programme | | | |
| a. Child centred | 12 (41.37) | 5 (17.25) | 17 (29.31) |
| b. Subject centred | 13 (44.87) | 12 (41.37) | 25 (43.10) |
| c. Both | 4 (13.79) | 11 (37.93) | 15 (25.86) |
| 5. Developmentally Appropriate Content | 18 (62.06) | 16 (55.17) | 34 (58.62) |
| 6. Caters to needs, purpose interest and abilities | 29 (100) | 29 (100) | 58 (100) |
| 7. According to curricular domain | 15 (51.72) | 15 (51.72) | 30 (51.72) |
| 8. Bring school bags | 6 (58.62) | 26 (86.65) | 43 (74.13) |
| 9. Given home work | 19 (65.51) | 21 (72.41) | 40 (68.96) |
| 10. Medium of Instruction | | | |
| a. English | 2 (6.89) | 4 (13.79) | 6 (10.34) |
| b. Hindi | 16 (55.17) | 14 (48.27) | 30 (57.72) |
| c. Both | 6 (20.68) | 9 (31.03) | 15 (25.86) |
| d. Local language | 5 (17.24) | 2 (6.89) | 7 (12.06) |
| 11. Pre-school run for | | | |
| a. 6 days a week | 22 (75.86) | 27 (93.10) | 49 (84.48) |
| b. 5 days a week | 7 (24.13) | 2 (6.89) | 9 (15.57) |
| 12. Total Working Hours | | | |
| a. 2-3 hours | - | 1 (3.44) | 1 (1.72) |
| b. 3-4 hours | 14 (48.27) | 20 (68.96) | 34 (58.62) |
| c. 4-5 hours | 15 (51.72) | 8 (27.58) | 23 (39.65) |

Figures in parentheses' indicate percentage.

syllabus for children and teach varied subjects like English, Hindi, Mathematics etc.

National Policy of Education (NPE, 1986) describes child centered approach as a warm, welcoming and encouraging approach in which all concerned share a solicitude for the need of the child, is the best motivation for the child to attend school and learn.

Child centered education is no doubt a best approach for children to make them grow in an enriched environment as this approach helps the child to think and feel, become an active, curious, self-reliant, creative and autonomous person who can benefit by school learning. All the child studies reflect that child centered curriculum is the best approach for the young children. Unfortunately so many even after years of independence our country does not have appropriate educational system for young children.

Developmentally appropriate content refers to the subject matter appropriate as per the developmental level, need and individual differences of the children. Results related to cultural areas depicted that 98.85 per cent urban government and 78.57 per cent urban private school reported to have the developmentally appropriate content, whereas in peri-urban area, 35.71 per cent responded positively but in rural area only 21.42 per cent school had developmentally appropriate curriculum. It means in rural areas, teachers have lack of knowledge and understanding regarding early childhood development, care and education components than urban setting.

During observation researchers found that the curriculum and teaching strategies were not satisfactory as the teachers were teaching three to four letter words in both Hindi and English language while in mathematics children were taught number and counting upto 100 and numerical of addition and subtraction to the children who were in the age group of 3-5 years. It was also observed that the teachers did not use any teaching aids except black board for teaching Hindi, English and Mathematics. Children were being asked to write on notebooks. An interesting fact was that the parents also expect that the teacher should complete the prescribed syllabus in time whether child is ready to understand the prescribed syllabus or not. Prescribed syllabus is also not age appropriate.

Bredenkamp (1987) elaborated, the explana-

tion of developmentally appropriate curriculum which is suitable for physical, emotional, social and cognitive characteristics and changes that occur in young children, and also responsive to individual differences in development.

Planning a developmentally appropriate curriculum means the teachers have to know each child where he is developmentally and what his individual talents and interests are? Developmentally Appropriate Practice also requires that teachers think about children's basic needs for play and rest that they should focus on children's development in all cultural areas. But personal observations were just opposite of the reported data. Most of the schools were having this type of curriculum on paper only and were not implementing practically. When asked, the teachers were not able to reply the questions related to developmental milestones for young children. Thus, it is very necessary for teachers to do some training courses to gain knowledge and experiences in this component.

Perusal of table 1 also revealed that in different cultural setting 85.71 per cent urban govt. schools, 71.42 per cent urban private, 28.57 per cent peri-urban and 14.28 per cent rural school had the curriculum consisted of all curricular domain. Both preschool labs had included all domains in their curriculum. It means that in urban areas school authorities are more aware and had more knowledge about various aspects of development and schools curriculum.

In this case also observations of the researcher differ from the reported data. In reality most of the schools were not following all the curricular domains. The curriculum content should include physical motor, socio-emotional, language, cognitive, aesthetic and environmental domains for an all round personality development of the young children. Kostelink et al. (1994) described that the children comprehensive curriculum is divided into six domains aesthetic, affective, cognitive, language, physical and social. If considered individually, the six domains represent major facets of child development.

The young children should be free from mental burden and the load of the notebooks and homework policy should not over burden them. This should be avoided instead of learning should be promoted through play way approach.

Table 1 elucidates that children were made to bring school bags by 85.71 per cent of urban

private and peri-urban, 78.57 per cent rural and 57.14 per cent government school. Home work was given to children by 92.85 per cent peri urban, 85.71 per cent urban private, 71.42 per cent rural and 35.71 per cent urban government schools. The less number of government schools were asking children to bring school bags and to take home work as compared to private schools because as per the guidelines for anganwadi and govt. schools children are not supposed to bring school bags and no home work Policy was practiced.

In this case, the researcher noticed that in almost all the school except anganwadi Centres the teachers were busy for almost whole day only in checking and giving the home work and were not spending enough time to conduct the activities. It was also interesting to note that sometime parents were complaining to teachers for not giving home work because they thought that, if the home work is given, it means the teachers were doing their job seriously and devoting time otherwise not. It was also observed that parents were of the view that they send children to school not just to play but to study as well. Both the preschool laboratories were against this opinion of taking bags and giving homework, as it is not developmentally appropriate. Though they gave some home assignment or activities like collecting different objects or things, pasting, drawing, printing, painting, collage work etc. in which parents can help the child.

Narayan (1993) had drawn the country's attention to this daily sight (carrying load of bags) by making a speech in the Rajya Sabha. The situation has become worse over the years even in pre-schools children could be seen carrying a bag of books and notebooks. This sight is not confined to metropolitan cities alone, it can be seen in small town and bigger villages too. Right from early childhood many children especially those belonging to middle classes are made to slung through homework, tuition and coaching classes of different kinds. The children's daily routine does not permit them to play, to enjoy simple pleasures and to explore the world.

Table 2 also highlight the results about different cultural settings for using medium of instructions revealed that 85.71 per cent rural, 64.28 per cent peri-urban, 42.85 per cent urban government and 21.42 per cent urban private

were using Hindi language. Whereas 21.42 per cent urban private, 14.28 per cent peri-urban and 7.14 per cent urban government and none of the rural schools were using English language as medium of instruction. Both languages (Hindi and English) were being used for instructions in 57.14 per cent urban private, 21.42 per cent urban government and 14.28 per cent peri-urban schools. Local languages were being used as medium of instruction by 28.57 per cent urban government schools. Both preschool labs reported to use both languages (Hindi and English) as medium of instruction.

Regarding schools duration and timings, the results suggest that majority of school were running for 6 days a week, urban Govt. – 78.57, urban private – 71.42, peri urban – 85.71, Rural – 100, pre-school lab – 100%.

The school timings should be 3-4 hours per day because the attention span of young children for one activity is 10-15 minutes only and after that children loose their concentration span and interest in that activity.

The area-wise data showed that maximum - school were falling in the category of 3-4 hrs schedule in urban private (100%), peri-urban (57.14%), urban government (42.8%) and pre-school lab (100%) whereas in rural area majority of schools were following 4-5 hours schedule (71.42%).

The researchers' observations suggested that a schedule of six days a week was a burden both for teacher and children. The teachers were not able to have time for preparation for sessions for the week. The children also looked very exhaustive. It was also observed that in some schools the longer schedule was being followed to accommodate young children in the same transport which would carry children from higher classes. To avoid exhaustion of younger children it was suggested to have some rest period during the day.

NCERT (1996) suggested in its specifications that children should attend pre-school five days in a week i.e. Monday to Friday. Saturday may be utilized by the teachers for program evaluation, planning of the next week's program and preparation of materials etc.

Since the purpose of education is to foster competence in all aspects of life, curriculum should provide opportunities for total learning. This is the best accomplished by considering the

Table 2: Agencies existing status of educational programmes for young children regarding curriculum

| <i>Sr. No.</i> | <i>Aspects</i> | <i>Response</i> | <i>Urban Govt. N=14</i> | <i>Urban Pvt. N=14</i> | <i>Peri Urban N=14</i> | <i>Rural N=14</i> | <i>Preschool Labs N=14</i> |
|----------------|--|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. | Goal based | Yes | 14 (100) | 14 (100) | 14 (100) | 14 (100) | 2 (100) |
| 2. | Philosophy based | Yes | 14 (100) | 14 (100) | 11 (78.57) | 13 (92.85) | 2 (100) |
| 3. | <i>Type of Philosophy</i> | | | | | | |
| a. | Montessori | Yes | - | 1 (7.14) | 2 (14.28) | - | - |
| b. | Play way | Yes | 14 (100) | 13 (92.85) | 9 (64.28) | 13 (92.85) | 2 (100) |
| c. | Not aware | Yes | - | - | 3 (21.42) | 1 (7.14) | - |
| d. | No Philosophy | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 4. | <i>Programme</i> | | | | | | |
| a. | Child centred | Yes | 6 (42.85) | 5 (35.71) | 2 (14.28) | 2 (14.28) | 2 (100) |
| b. | Subject centred | Yes | 6 (42.85) | 5 (35.71) | 9 (64.28) | 5 (35.71) | - |
| c. | Both | Yes | 2 (14.28) | 4 (28.57) | 2 (14.28) | 7 (50.00) | - |
| 5. | Developmentally appropriate content | Yes | 13 (92.85) | 11 (78.57) | 5 (35.71) | 9 (21.42) | 2 (100) |
| 6. | Caters to needs, purpose, interest and abilities | Yes | 14 (100) | 14 (100) | 14 (100) | 14 (100) | 2 (100) |
| 7. | According to all curriculum domain | Yes | 10 (71.42) | 12 (85.71) | 4 (28.57) | 2 (14.28) | 2 (100) |
| 8. | Bring school bags | Yes | 8 (57.14) | 12 (85.71) | 12 (85.71) | 11 (78.57) | - |
| 9. | Given home work | Yes | 5 (35.71) | 12 (85.71) | 13 (92.85) | 10 (71.42) | - |
| 10. | <i>Medium of Instruction</i> | | | | | | |
| a. | English | Yes | 1 (7.14) | 3 (21.42) | 2 (14.28) | - | - |
| b. | Hindi | Yes | 6 (42.85) | 3 (21.42) | 9 (64.28) | 12 (85.71) | - |
| c. | Both | Yes | 3 (21.42) | 8 (57.14) | 2 (14.28) | - | 2 (100) |
| d. | Local language | Yes | 4 (28.57) | - | 1 (7.14) | 2 (14.28) | - |
| 11. | <i>School run for</i> | | | | | | |
| a. | 6 days a week | Yes | 11 (78.57) | 10 (71.42) | 12 (85.71) | 14 (100) | 2 (100) |
| b. | 5 days a week | Yes | 3 (21.42) | 4 (28.57) | 2 (14.28) | - | - |
| 12. | <i>Total Working Hours</i> | | | | | | |
| a. | 2-3 hours | - | 1 (7.14) | - | - | - | - |
| b. | 3-4 hours | Yes | 6 (42.85) | 14 (100) | 8 (57.14) | 4 (28.57) | 2 (100) |
| c. | 4-5 hours | Yes | 7 (50) | - | 6 (20.68) | 10 (71.42) | - |

Figures in parentheses's indicate percentage.

six aspects of the child's personality (physical, emotional, social, aesthetic, language and cognitive).

KEYWORDS Curriculum. Philosophy. Peri-urban. Developmentally Appropriate Practice. Domain. Comprehensive. Pre-school

ABSTRACT A study was conducted on 58 schools (29 from Hisar Distt. of Haryana and 29 schools from union territory Chandigarh) have pre-schools, to investigate the pre-school curriculum and its implementation in different cultural settings, the results showed that the main goal of the curriculum was to educate children and make them good human beings. Data reported that majority of schools having philosophy based curriculum, but observation based information reflected that very few schools know even the meaning of philosophy and they did not follow any philosophy. The results also elucidates that children were made to bring school / bag, do home work etc. Majority of schools were running 6 days in a week and 3-4 hours per day but still it can be concluded that young human resources are overburdened rather developing properly in a normal environment. Therefore, this section needs attention for all concerned quarters.

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