

## Parent – Teacher Perception of Early Childhood Education

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The early childhood years have been universally recognised as crucial years for laying the foundation. The significance of education during these early years of life hardly needs to be emphasized today since researchers have proved that this is the most impressionable period of one's life. Impressions gained at this tender age have a far-reaching effect on life. It is therefore, essential that a rich environment be provided to the child during this period of his growth and development. This necessitates the provision of good facilities for education outside home. Many studies have revealed that experience in early childhood education has positive impact on the overall development of the child and the children had positive attitude towards classroom activities (Lazer, 1982; Shechan, 1991; Vijayakhader, 1993 and Dhillon, 1997).

Educationally, the period of early childhood is believed to be very important. It is known by different nomenclatures such as pre-school education, nursery school education, etc. Early childhood education can be defined as the education provided to children from 3 to 6 years of age. In the present investigation, early childhood education has been referred to as the education provided by the nursery school, which intends to prepare children between 3 to 4 years of age for admission to formal schools, i.e., for kindergarten. The main aim of such schools is to stimulate the alround development of the child, which includes physical, social, language, intellectual and moral developments. With substantial advances in the field, influencing the effectiveness of early childhood education, awareness of how it is being perceived is necessary.

The pre-school serves as a 'bridge' between parents and teachers. A child gradually learns to walk over this 'bridge'. He emerges more independent and self-reliant (Pathak, 1987). The mutual understanding and cooperation on the part of the parents and the institution is extremely important. If both invest time to be in contact with each other to promote communication, it

will surely help in the overall development of the child and will lead to enduring rewards. All this mainly rests on their perceptions regarding early childhood education. In fact, their perceptions are being regulated by the academic expectations from a 3 to 4 year old child, which in turn are being regulated by those of the administrators of formal schools. It makes the parents anxious and as a result knowingly or unknowingly force the pre-schools to gear their programmes to meet the expectations of the formal schools and compel the teachers and parents to have a blurred perception of early childhood education.

Perceptions are very personal and can be defined as a mental process in which the mind considers number of aspects simultaneously to make up a complete and whole object. In the present study, 'perception' has been defined as opinions of parents and teachers of pre-schoolers with regard to early childhood education. The parents blame the schools for insisting upon a vast syllabus, whereas schools hold the parents responsible for the burden on the child as the parents wish to secure admission of their ward in a 'good' school and the vicious circle goes on. In order to understand how today's education is influencing the child's development, it is essential to look at the concept, objectives, contents and methods of nursery school education as perceived by child educators – parents and teachers.

In view of the above, the present study is an attempt to assess the perception of parents and teachers of pre-schoolers regarding early childhood education. It intends to evaluate the appropriateness of the perception held by parents and teachers through exploration of similarities and differences observed in perception of parents and teachers of pre-schoolers regarding early childhood education. Finally it aims at proposing an intervention for education of child educators (parents and teachers) regarding various aspects of early childhood education.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sample for the present study was collected from the private nursery schools in some of the selected localities of Ludhiana City, namely, Sarabha Nagar, Model Town, Model Gram, Urban Estate, Civil Lines and Bhai Randhir Singh Nagar. Ten nursery schools were selected from these localities at random. A representative sample of 300 parents of pre-schoolers attending the selected nursery schools (parents of at least 15 children from each selected nursery school) and 20 teachers of nursery schools (at least 2 from each selected nursery school) were taken for the present study.

A self structured interview schedule was specifically designed to assess the perception of parents and teachers for the following quality indicators of nursery school programme – 'criteria of an ideal nursery school', 'age for admission', 'activity planning', 'teacher qualification', 'importance of activities', 'teacher-child ratio', 'teaching aids' and 'techniques', 'parental participation', 'medium of instruction', 'record keeping', 'homework', 'expectations from the nursery school child when he leaves for a formal school'. The schedule was subjected to a pilot study and was refined after making necessary alterations before final use. Observations were also made in the selected nursery schools with regard to the various aspects covered in the interview so as to verify/supplement the information collected through the later. Visits were made to the selected nursery schools for recording observations and to interview teachers. Parents (both mothers and fathers) were interviewed either in school or at their home.

The investigator recorded the responses thus obtained, which were tabulated and analysed by computing percentages. Appropriateness in the perception of respondents, was judged on the basis of 'Minimum Specifications for Pre-schools' given by NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training – Delhi, India). For aspects of early childhood education on which specifications are not available, expert opinions of experienced teachers, researchers and scholars of the department of Human Development, College of Home Science, PAU, Ludhiana were taken and perceptions of respon-

dents were evaluated accordingly.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Input Indicators of the Quality of Nursery School Programme

Input indicators mainly reflect the necessary elements for running an effective nursery school programme to promote quality in early childhood education. Early childhood education is characteristically a play and activity based programme for which an essential requirement is adequate indoor and outdoor space as per the NCERT specifications. Specific dimensions given for indoor space as per the standards are 20-40 sq. ft. per child and for outdoor space, it is suggested to be 80-100 sq. ft. per child. The results of the study highlight the fact that till date the sampled child educators are not aware of the material and psychological needs of the children. Table 1 shows that 88% parents and 80% teachers were quite inappropriate in their judgement of the adequate space requirement of a child for his optimum growth and development. They seemed to have blurred estimates of the adequate space, which a quality education programme should make available to a child. It was noted that majority of the sampled nursery schools lacked adequate indoor and outdoor space. Being the private establishments, the cost of land remains a major factor for the entrepreneur in this regard.

Besides parents, a teacher greatly influences a child's personality. NCERT specifies that a well-planned and systematic training of nursery school teacher is very essential keeping in mind the specialised nature of early childhood education. Thirteen percent parents and 15% nursery school teachers did not feel that it is essential for a nursery school programme to have specially trained teachers (Table 1). Parents and teachers differed in their views regarding qualification of nursery school teachers. Desirable academic qualification for the teachers of nursery school, as recommended by NCERT, is a graduate with specialisation in Child Development or Early Childhood Education. However, 70% parents and 40% teachers were not aware of such qualifications, which a teacher should possess for dealing with children of a nursery school



**Table 1: Perception regarding input indicators of the quality of nursery school programme**

| S. No. | Aspect                                                                   | Category               | Parents (n=300) | Total no. of responses | Teachers (n=20) | Total no. of responses |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1.     | Essential to have adequate indoor space                                  | Yes                    | 264 (88)        | 300                    | 18 (90)         | 20                     |
|        |                                                                          | No                     | 36 (12)         |                        | 2 (10)          |                        |
| 2.     | * Desirability of indoor space per child in terms of specific dimensions | Below 20 sq. ft.       | 54 (21)         |                        | 3 (17)          |                        |
|        |                                                                          | 20-40 sq. ft.          | 20 (7)          | 264                    | 3 (17)          | 18                     |
|        |                                                                          | 40-60 sq. ft.          | 22 (8)          |                        | 2 (11)          |                        |
|        |                                                                          | No specific dimensions | 168 (64)        |                        | 10 (55)         |                        |
| 3.     | Essential to have adequate outdoor space                                 | Yes                    | 260 (87)        | 300                    | 18 (90)         | 20                     |
|        |                                                                          | No                     | 40 (13)         |                        | 2 (10)          |                        |
| 4.     | *Desirability of outdoor space per child in terms of specific dimensions | Below 50 sq. ft.       | 30 (12)         |                        | 2 (11)          |                        |
|        |                                                                          | 50-80 sq. ft.          | 22 (8)          | 260                    | 2 (11)          | 18                     |
|        |                                                                          | 80-100 sq. ft.         | 40 (15)         |                        | 4 (22)          |                        |
|        |                                                                          | No specific dimensions | 168 (65)        |                        | 10 (56)         |                        |
| 5.     | Academic qualification of nursery school teacher                         | Graduate               | 128 (40)        |                        | 8 (32)          |                        |
|        |                                                                          | Graduate + NTT         | 96 (30)         | 324                    | 15 (60)         | 25                     |
|        |                                                                          | Graduate + B. Ed.      | 70 (21)         |                        | 1 (4)           |                        |
|        |                                                                          | Post Graduate          | 30 (9)          |                        | 1 (4)           |                        |
| 6.     | Age for admission                                                        | 2 ½ years              | 56 (19)         |                        | 5 (25)          |                        |
|        |                                                                          | 3 years                | 138 (46)        | 300                    | 14 (70)         | 20                     |
|        |                                                                          | 3 ½ years              | 106 (35)        |                        | 1 (5)           |                        |
| 7.     | Teacher-child ratio                                                      | 1:10                   | 82 (27)         |                        | 6 (30)          |                        |
|        |                                                                          | 1:15                   | 116 (39)        | 300                    | 3 (15)          | 20                     |
|        |                                                                          | 1:20                   | 62 (21)         |                        | 4 (20)          |                        |
|        |                                                                          | 1:25                   | 40 (13)         |                        | 7 (35)          |                        |

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages, which are expressed by total no. of responses for each aspect

\* Only those answered yes to the adequate indoor and outdoor space as essential were asked about the desirability

(Table 1). Most of the teachers in the sampled nursery school did not have any specialised training. This is perhaps on account of the fact that till today the job of nursery school teacher has not been given the status and importance it rightly deserves.

According to NCERT specifications, a child is ready for a nursery school programme when he/she is able to bear separation and anxiety from his/her family, has developed some verbal competence, can communicate his/her basic needs and has become toilet trained. Generally, a child is ready in these terms at three years of age. Statistical details of results indicate that 30% teachers' while majority of parents' (54%) perception was not appropriate in this regard (Table 1). Society abounds in nuclear families and working couples who send their children to school as early as possible to fulfill their job obligations. Too much of competition also makes the parents eager to teach the children more and more at the earliest. Most of the nursery schools being private enterprises wish to have more children on their rolls. Consequently, sometimes even a child of less than 3 years is allowed admission.

The desirable teacher-child ratio in a nursery school programme is very important from the point of view of rendering individual stimulation to a child. Experts are of the opinion that low teacher-child ratio, i.e., 1:10 is the most desirable for a nursery school programme. A wide variation was observed in the perception of teachers and parents. Teachers (35%) preferred higher ratios (1:25) while parents (39%) go for 1:15 teacher-child ratio, as they want their child to get the individual attention of the teacher (Table 1). No doubt, lesser the number of children, better is the care available to a child by his teacher. Results of the present study are supported by findings made by Russell (1990) that most of the teachers believed that difference in ratio of about 2 children rarely had an impact on the teacher-child behaviour and so a preference was given to higher ratios. Contrary to this view of teachers, Russell noticed a greater effect of the ratio on the behaviour of the child than that of the teacher. Under higher ratios, even teachers were found to confront with more problematic child behaviour. Only 27% parents and 30% teachers were found to be appropriate in their perception in this regard (Table 1). It was clearly

noticed that the sampled nursery schools exceeded the expert recommendations in this regard. In order to earn more profits, the proprietors employed only the minimum possible number of teachers in a nursery school. The other possible reason may be the unavailability of the appropriate teachers for nursery schools.

## 2. Process Indicators of the Quality of Nursery School Programme

Unlike input indicators, process indicators reflect what actually happens in a nursery school programme. These include day-to-day activities and plans, which are carried on, to fulfill the objectives of early childhood education. Parental participation in early childhood education is of paramount importance. Experts opine that a nursery school programme should acquaint the parents with the programme and should invite their suggestions on it. Brien (1989) revealed that both parents and teachers believe that children learn more when the significant adults in their lives together act as a team. However, the present investigation found that 26% parents and 35% nursery school teachers were inappropriate in their perception with regard to this aspect (Table 2).

Environmental studies are very important and essential activities in a nursery school as these bring about the intellectual, emotional and social development of the child. However, 18% parents and 25% teachers were inappropriate in

their perception as they think that a child is too young to understand the nature around him (Table 2). In order to achieve the objective of around development of children and to bring about their physical, social, emotional, cognitive and aesthetic growth, variety of play activities should be planned in a nursery school. Play activities like songs, music and dance, story telling, clay and sand play, drawing and painting, doll and block corners in a nursery school programme were considered essential by all the respondents except 5% parents and 2% teachers (Table 2). Perhaps, this small percentage of respondents is unaware of the role of these play activities in the development of a child. They are of the view that real good learning can only be through books. Hannon and James (1990) also worked on parents and teachers perspective on development of the children during pre-school years and found that very high level of parental interest was found centered on books and print related activities, while teachers laid more emphasis on developing pre-reading and writing skills. Their study concluded that they were not sure about the place of literacy in a nursery curriculum.

Medium of instruction in a nursery school programme hardly needs to be emphasized, since it plays the most crucial role in promoting good communication. NCERT specifies that mother tongue should be the medium of instruction for a nursery school child. Table 2 shows that 33%

Table 2: Perception regarding process indicators of the quality of nursery school programme

| S. No. | Aspect                                                                                       | Category                    | Parents (n=300) | Total no. of responses | Teachers (n=20) | Total no. of responses |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1.     | Parental opinion should be considered regarding what should be taught to the child at school | Yes                         | 222 (74)        | 300                    | 13 (65)         | 20                     |
|        |                                                                                              | No                          | 78 (26)         |                        | 7 (35)          |                        |
| 2.     | Environment study is essential                                                               | Yes                         | 246 (82)        | 300                    | 15 (75)         | 20                     |
|        |                                                                                              | No                          | 54 (18)         |                        | 5 (25)          |                        |
| 3.     | Medium of instruction                                                                        | Mother tongue               | 102 (33)        |                        | 10 (42)         |                        |
|        |                                                                                              | English                     | 112 (36)        | 310                    | 8 (33)          | 24                     |
|        |                                                                                              | Left to teacher             | 96 (31)         |                        | 6 (25)          |                        |
| 4.     | Aspects of which the records should be kept in a nursery school                              | Physical aspect             | 120 (16)        |                        | 8 (15)          |                        |
|        |                                                                                              | Health aspect               | 114 (15)        | 754                    | 9 (17)          | 53                     |
|        |                                                                                              | Social and emotional aspect | 176 (23)        |                        | 10 (19)         |                        |
|        |                                                                                              | Cognitive aspect            | 230 (31)        |                        | 18 (34)         |                        |
|        |                                                                                              | Aesthetic aspect            | 114 (15)        |                        | 8 (15)          |                        |
| 5.     | Homework for a nursery school child                                                          | Yes                         | 42 (14)         | 300                    | 3 (15)          | 20                     |
|        |                                                                                              | No                          | 258 (86)        |                        | 17 (85)         |                        |

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages, which are expressed by total no. of responses for each aspect



parents and 42% teachers were appropriate in this regard. Communication between the teacher and the child is most easy through the medium of mother tongue. However, 33% teachers and 36% parents suggested English to be the medium of instruction for a nursery school child. In this fast moving world of competitions they expect their child to learn English at a very early stage. Besides, English as a language enjoys a good status in the society. They choose to ignore the fact that by opting for English as the medium of instruction, they confuse and burden the child in his early life. Sometimes, such a situation leads to a very serious maladjustment and makes the child for failing to communicate satisfactorily. Yashodhara (1991) in a study on attitude of parents towards aspects of pre-school education, revealed parents' overall ignorance about the right role of medium of instruction in a child's life. Parents were found to be more in favour of English than the mother tongue.

Individual record keeping of children gives us complete and accurate information about them as and when required. According to experts, records of social and emotional aspect are of greater importance than that of other developmental aspects, i.e., physical, cognitive and aesthetic. Only 23% parents and 19% teachers were found to be in concordance with the expert opinion (Table 2). The majority of parents did opt for record keeping for children but drew a blank when asked about the aspects on which it should be maintained. It might be because they do not take early childhood education of their child so

seriously. They are mainly interested in preparing him to join a 'reputed' formal school. They do not have time as well as the necessary will to measure, record and watch the behavioural and emotional changes, which a child undergoes during his early education. Therefore, record keeping of such a young child at school appears to them to be superfluous and unneeded. At the most, they find the record keeping of the child's well being relevant and sufficient.

Experts think that homework for a nursery school child is no less than a burden. Perception of majority of parents (86%) and teachers (85%) was noted to be in tune with the expert opinion. However, 14% parents and 15% teachers argued that homework inculcates a good sense of responsibility at an early age (Table 2).

### 3. Output Indicators of the Quality of Nursery School Programme

The desired outcome of a nursery school education is the child being ready for formal school education. Indicators that reflect formal school readiness have been called output indicators.

Besides, the education of the child at nursery school, parents and teachers show special concern to his forthcoming admission to formal school. The admission to the latter is not so easy in densely populated city like Ludhiana. Table 3 shows that majority of the parents (65%) and teachers (65%) agreed with the expert opinion that admission of nursery school child is not sure to a 'reputed formal school'.

It can be explained that performance of a

**Table 3: Perception regarding output indicators of the quality of nursery school programme**

| S. No. | Aspect                                                                        | Category                              | Parents (n=300) | Total no. of responses | Teachers (n=20) | Total no. of responses |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1.     | Assured entry of a nursery school child to a reputed formal school            | Yes                                   | 106 (35)        | 300                    | 7 (35)          | 20                     |
|        |                                                                               | No                                    | 194 (65)        |                        | 13 (65)         |                        |
| 2.     | Expectations from a child at the time of his/her admission to a formal school | Poems                                 | 180 (12)        | 1446                   | 16 (17)         | 98                     |
|        |                                                                               | Stories                               | 138 (10)        |                        | 9 (9)           |                        |
|        |                                                                               | Concept of colour, shapes, size, etc. | 192 (13)        |                        | 12 (12)         |                        |
|        |                                                                               | Puzzle solving                        | 126 (9)         |                        | 10 (10)         |                        |
|        |                                                                               | Elementary drawing                    | 166 (12)        |                        | 12 (12)         |                        |
|        |                                                                               | General confidence                    | 274 (19)        |                        | 17 (18)         |                        |
|        |                                                                               | Basic eye-hand coordination           | 178 (12)        |                        | 9 (9)           |                        |
|        |                                                                               | General social etiquette's            | 192 (13)        |                        | 13 (13)         |                        |

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages, which are expressed by total no. of responses for each aspect

child on a pre-determined day of the interview by no way is an indication of the suitability of the child for his/her admission to a formal school. This leads to questions concerning expectations from the child leaving after his/her education at a nursery school. It has been observed that all the respondents mainly expected the child to have general confidence when he/she comes out of the nursery school. This is because he/she is expected to compete at various levels in his/her life, adjust himself/herself according to the social norms and develop his/her personality potentials to the utmost.

### CONCLUSION

The present study noted that though parents and teachers of nursery school seem to be genuinely concerned with the early childhood education of children under their charge, yet they are given to few misconceptions and socially compulsive but educationally unapproved practices. The findings of the present study strongly recommend intervention measures for parents and teachers for improving the quality of nursery school education.

First of all, there is a need to enlighten the human resources engaged in the highly sensitive and professional task of imparting early childhood education. Since, teachers are the persons to be in relationship with the child outside the four walls of his/her home, it is imperative that this experience of the child is not only pleasant and inviting but also of real good use to him.

A really useful change in the present scenario and in the thinking of the concerned personnel can be made by holding workshops, seminars and short courses. Workshops, can promote the interest of the parents in the early childhood education, which has not been taken as a serious activity. By evoking interest of parents, teachers, educational planners, bureaucrats and policy makers, a better understanding of one another's perspectives and to promote cooperative efforts in educating children could be created. It is only through such concerted efforts that the task of early childhood education can be given its due importance.

The present study brought to light that many children below the recommended age are admit-

ted to nursery schools of the city. This is a highly unhealthy and perilous practice, which must be checked at all costs. In fact, in the absence of proper creches and day care centres in the city, parents send their too young children to nursery schools of the city.

During the course of the study, it was noted that parents as well as teachers are very fond of children and love them immensely, but in spite of such a fund of goodwill they do not handle them with enough professional competence. Nursery school teachers should be properly qualified and trained, as the qualification and training of the staff is perhaps the single most important factor in determining the quality of early childhood education programmes. There should be specified time scales with attractive conditions of service and facility of in service training for pre-school teachers.

It has been noted that there is no quality control of any Government or non-Government educational organisation on the nursery school education. Consequently, the facilities and activities at these schools lack standardization. Efforts must be made to evolve a *modus operandi* whereby 'Minimum Specifications for Pre-schools' is duly implemented by all the nursery schools. There should be uniformity with regard to the objectives, curriculum and programmes of nursery schools.

All nursery schools should be recognised and standardized by a proper educational body of the government. All nursery schools should be affiliated to it for observing standard practices, curriculum, maintaining the recommended teacher-child ratio, safety standards, making available the recommended facilities and equipment.

**KEY WORDS** Perception: Early Childhood Education. Quality and Nursery Schools.

**ABSTRACT** The present study was an attempt to measure the concordance and appropriateness of the perception of parents and teachers of nursery schools regarding early childhood education. A representative sample of 300 parents and 20 nursery school teachers from 10 randomly selected nursery schools of different localities of Ludhiana was subjected to a specially developed interview schedule. Perception of the respondents was recorded and measured with regard to various indicators of quality early childhood education. The results of the study reveal that parents and teachers differed with respect to teacher qualification,



teacher-child ratio, importance of play activities, medium of instruction and were similar in their perceptions with regard to the remaining indicators. The perception of the respondents was inappropriate with regard to indoor and outdoor space requirements, teacher qualification, teacher-child ratio, importance of play activities, expectations from a nursery school child while leaving for a formal school and were appropriate for the rest of the indicators.

The study concludes that intervention at parental and school levels is essential to improve the quality of early childhood education.

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