

Parental Perception Towards Preschool Education Imparted at Early Childhood Education Centers

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ABSTRACT The present research was conducted to assess parental perception towards preschool education imparted at early childhood education centres. The sample comprised of 200 parents (100 mothers and 100 fathers) with at least one child in the age group of 3 to 6 years. Half of the selected parents were those who had enrolled their children at anganwadi centers and other half was those who sent their children to other preschool centers. The results revealed that the parents irrespective of whether they sent their children to anganwadi or preschools held similar views about the meaning of preschool education, skills acquired at ECD centers, teaching methodology, and role of ICDS centers in preschool education. Most parents (81%) thought of preschool education as a combination of concepts which included an age bound format related to preparation for primary schooling and provision of learning in an interactive manner. Most parents (25%) felt that children who attend early childhood development centers (ECD) cultivate good health and hygiene habits, develop preliteracy skills (19%) and communication skills (16%). Majority of parents perceive that play way approach as a best method for imparting early childhood education. Significant differences were found among the awareness of parents regarding ICDS scheme. Most parents were aware about the nutrition facility only and did not consider these centers are adequately equipped to provide preschool education. Parents sending their children to regular preschool centers were found to be less aware about ICDS scheme and its role in preschool education.

INTRODUCTION

Preschool education plays significant role as it helps children in successful completion of primary education. It provides the foundation for all around development and enables the child to understand various issues (Shabnam 2003). Children at this stage need to be encouraged to develop positive attitude through child to nature and the child to child interaction education is to be designed carefully to provide wholesome growth and development of children.(Harkness and Super 1991).Parents play an important role in the early childhood care and education(Lau and Lueng 1992).Parent involvement is linked to children's total learning. The greater parent involvement in children's learning positively affect the school performance including higher academic achievement (Yan and Lin 2002). Parents believe that three to six is the right age for the child to receive preschool education as the child is able to understand things well (Comer 1991). Research studies have shown that preschool education enhance early literacy skills, child's ability to learn, to communicate ideas and feelings and to get along well with others. Children who receive quality preschool education are more likely

to succeed in school and in life (Sander 2003). Children with richer literacy environment demonstrate higher level of reading knowledge and skills at preschool entry (Nord and Lennon 2002). Good preschool education increases cognitive abilities, school achievement, improves classroom behavior, decrease grade repetition among children (Barnett 2004). Parents consider that preschools, kindergarten, Balwadis or Anganwadis play a vital role to enhance the overall development of the child (www.ECD group.com). Parents perceive that play way approach in preschool centers is the best method for teaching as it helps in total learning and facilitate developmental out comes in children (Dauber et al. 1993). Preschool education is therefore an integral part of child –rearing experience provided by any agency for all children. One of the providers of early childhood care and education in India is Integrated Child Development Services Scheme. Preschool education is one the component of ICDS Scheme. But this remains one of the weakest component of ICDS. Many parents feel the quality of preschool education in anganwadi centers is poor and workers are less favorably inclined towards children (Shabnam 2003). The anganwadi worker

try to use two-way interaction method and take the help of teaching aids for imparting preschool education to the children. Indigenous material are usually used to make aids like puppets, fruits, etc, yet parents are not satisfied with the preschool education in ICDS centers as the anganwadi worker do not seem to make any effort to strengthen the component and continues lay more emphasis on nutrition (Arora et al. 2006).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodological frame out for the study was under:

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample for the present study comprised 200 parents (100 mothers and 100 fathers) residing in Kashmir valley. 100 parents were those whose children attended Anganwadi centres and the remaining were those whose children attended other preschool centers apart from ICDS centers. Only those parents were selected who had at least one preschool child that is, children in the age group of 3 to 6 years of age. Both fathers and mothers were included so as to get different perspective regarding preschool education and the role of ICDS in preschool education. The entire sample was selected from middle SES families through the use of snowball sampling technique.

Research Instrument: The tools used for data gathering in the present study were a self-devised questionnaire. Both open ended and close ended questions were included and the questionnaire was pretested on the sample of ten parents. After preliminary analysis certain alterations were made and some more questions about parents' perspective were included. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, first was related to general information like name, age educational qualification, number of children, occupation, etc. The second part consisted of queries related to importance and meaning of preschool education, aspects of preschool education and the role of ICDS in preschool education.

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

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Meaning of Preschool Education

Most parents (40.5) saw preschool education

is a combination of concepts (Table 1). For most it was the initial preparatory step towards formal primary schooling. According to this group of parent's children who attend any type of preschool centre are better equipped to handle school in later years. These results are similar to those of Denton et al. (2003) as they reported that preschool education means to develop early literacy skills among children and further such children gain proficiency in later grades. For significant 14% of the parents it was a time bound concepts which specifically catered to the needs of 3 to 6 years old. For some parents preschool education refers to learning in an interactive manner. Since the recipient of this education is young toddlers therefore, it requires an open exchange of learning among the children and teachers. Also, the results reveal significant differences in the opinion of parents who send their children to anganwadi centers and those who send their children to regular preschools.

Benefits of Early Childhood Education

The data reveals that majority of parents (43%) thought that children get multiple benefits from early childhood education (Table 2). 25% of parent's emphasis on the need to develop pre-literacy skills. According to them children must first learn early literacy concepts as it could help them to face the later years with more confidence and ease. Some parents felt that when children enter any preschool centre they discover and experiment new things by exploring the environment and develop different concepts too. And most of the parents perceive that apart from learning all such foundational skills children develop ability to communicate with others and also express their feelings and ideas with each other. Significant differences were found in the perception of parents sending their children to anganwadi centers and preschool centers with regard to benefit of preschool education. More preschool parents focus on developmental of concepts, exploration and experimentation and on learning communication skills.

Skills Acquired in ECD Centres

Data reveals that majority of parents (25.5%) felt that children who attend early childhood centre cultivate good health and hygiene habits (Table 3). According to them whatever the child

Table 1: Meaning of preschool education

Meaning	Anganwadi parents	Preschool parents	Total	Percentage (%)
Education that is provided between 3 to 6 years.	11	17	28	14.0
Preparation for primary schooling	36	36	72	36.0
Learning in an interactive manner	5	14	19	9.5
All of the above	48	33	81	40.5
Total	100	100	200	100.0

$\lambda, 8.3$ $\alpha=0.05$,df 3,tab val,7.81,significant

Table 2: Benefits of early childhood education

Benefits	Anganwadi parents	Preschool parents	Total	Percentage (%)
Develop preliteracy skill	26	24	50	25.0
Discover new things	5	9	14	7.0
Development of concepts	10	15	25	12.5
Opportunity to explore	6	11	17	8.5
Communication skill	-	8	8	4.0
All the above	53	33	86	43.0
Total	100	100	200	100.0

$\lambda, 16.32$ $\alpha, 0.05$ df,5 tab val,11.1,significant

Table 3: Skills acquired in ECD Centres

Skills	Anganwadi parents	Preschool parents	Total	Percentage (%)
Develop preliteracy skills	38	-	38	19.0
Develop communication skill	-	32	32	16.0
Eating habit	-	12	12	6.0
Cultivate good habits and hygiene habits	29	22	51	25.5
Develop confidence	10	17	27	13.5
Activeness	10	-	10	5.0
Fine-motor development	13	-	13	6.5
Social development	-	17	17	8.5
Total	100	100	200	100.0

$\lambda, 109.6$, $\alpha = 0.05$, df 7, tab val 14.1, significant

Table 4: Preference of parents about teaching approach

Teaching approach	Anganwadi parents	Preschool parents	Total	Percentage (%)
Play way	59	45	104	52.0
Formal method	-	-	-	-
Combination of above	41	55	96	48.0
Total	100	100	200	100.0

$\lambda, 3.92$, $\alpha=0.05$,df 2, tab val,5.99

Table 5: Awareness of parents regarding ICDS services

Services	Anganwadi parents	Preschool parents	Total	Percentage (%)
Supplementary nutrition	13	10	23	11.5
Vaccination	-	-	-	-
Preschool Education	-	-	-	-
Combination of above	87	13	100	50.0
Not aware	-	77	77	38.5
Total	100	100	200	100.0

$\lambda, 132.12$ $\alpha=0.05$, df,4 tab val, 9.49, significant

Table 6: Perception of parents about role of ICDS in early education

<i>Role of ICDS</i>	<i>Anganwadi parents</i>	<i>Preschool parents</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes	59	-	59	29.5
No	41	100	141	70.5
Total	100	100	200	100.0

λ , 110.6 α 0.05, df 1, tab val, 3.84, significant

learns and cultivates at this stage get deeply embedded and has profound influence on their overall personality. For significant 19% of the parents felt that children primarily need to learn about the 3R's. They develop preliteracy concepts related to colour, counting, alphabet, shape, texture, numeracy and also learn differentiation, identification and classification of things. Some parents had visualized that when children attend early childhood centre they learn to communicate and develop proper eating habits. And most of the parents thought that children develop individuality skills like confidence and activeness and also get master basic motor skills and develop flexibility to adjust in a group. Significant differences were found among the parents regarding the skills acquire by children when they attend ECD centre. Anganwadi parents focused more on development of preliteracy skills, activeness and fine motor development. On the other hand, preschool parents reported that children develop communication skills, eating habits, confidence and social skills.

Preference of Parents about Teaching Approach

It reveals that most of the parents (52%) perceived that play way approach is the best method for teaching in ECD centers (Table 4). It helps the children to learn and retain things for longer time and also feel less boredom. According to this group when early childhood education is imparted through play way method it becomes more effective and enhance the children's potential for overall development. Other parents (48%) however preferred a combination of formal and play way method as a better method of teaching. According to them some concepts need to be imparted can be done through play way approach. These parents reported that when children are taught only through play way they tend to become non-serious.

Awareness of Parents Regarding ICDS Services

It is elucidate that majority of the parents (50%) were aware about all the services of ICDS Scheme which have a beneficial impact on the children's overall development (Table 5). Significant differences were found among the two groups of parents about their awareness regarding ICDS Services. 77% of the preschool parents were not aware of any of the services being imparted under ICDS Scheme. In both the categories there was however more knowledge about the nutrition scheme only. Same findings are held in a study that parents usually consider anganwadi centre as a bread centre", where only nutrition is given. They felt that quality of services are poor and children does not learn much (www.righttoindia.com)

Perception of Parents about Role of ICDS in Early education

It depicts that majority of parents (70.5%) perceived that ICDS does not play role in early childhood education (Table 6). According to them centers are ill-equipped to provide early childhood education. The teachers are not properly trained and lay more emphasis on nutrition. There is no proper schedule or curriculum. Children do not learn all necessary concepts in these centres. Some parents (29.5%) thought that it plays an important role by developing preliteracy concepts among children and provide healthy foundation for lifelong learning. Those who sent their children in preschool centers were more negatively critical about the role of ICDS in early childhood centers

CONCLUSION

Early childhood education has a significant role to play in perpetuating the desirable changes

in society. Preschool is the Child's first step towards organized care and learning in the larger society. It provides a major influence on the development of Child's intellectual capacities, interpersonal skills, social behavior and personality of children. Early childhood education in its wider sense implies not only on acquisition of knowledge but also the development of abilities, skills and qualities of character (Shabnam 2003). Findings of the present study indicate significant differences in the opinion of parents regarding early childhood education. Majority of parent's visualized preschool education is a combination of concepts. It is the initial preparatory step towards primary schooling. They felt that when children receive education at an early age in an interactive and learning manner they are better equipped to handle schools in later years. Majority of parents thought that children get multiple benefits from early childhood education. 25% of parents emphasis on the need to develop concepts related to color, shape, texture, number, alphabetical, counting etc. Most of the parents felt that when children attend preschool centre they learn to discover new things by exploring the environment. For some, children develop ability to communicate, when they get along with others and express their views and ideas with each others. Findings corroborated with the findings of study conducted by Edsall (2004) that parents believed that preschool education benefits preschoolers in multiple ways, they develop early literacy and communication skills which significantly improves children's later life opportunities and provide basement for formal education. Significant differences were seen among the parents regarding the skills acquire by children. Majority of parents felt that when children attend early childhood centre they cultivate good health and hygiene habits. Findings also elucidate that parents believed that play way approach as a best method for teaching basics. They perceive that preschool education becomes more effective and enriched when it is based on play way approach. It helps the children to learn and absorb things quickly and get more enjoyment out of it. Significant differences were found among the awareness of parents regarding ICDS Scheme. Majority of parents were aware about all the services of ICDS which catered the needs of the children. But some parents were not aware of any services of ICDS and some who were aware about

the nutrition facility only. The results of the study also elucidate that parents perceive that anganwadi does not play any role in preschool education. The centers were lacked almost all necessary facilities which could help to lay the sound foundation for formal learning. Teachers are not properly trained and do not make any effort to strengthen the preschool education component. Parents who sent their children to preschool centers were found to be least aware about ICDS Scheme and did not appreciate its role in preschool education.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Parents should be sensitized to the importance of preschool education and its vital role in children's lives. Parents should also be made aware about the importance of play way approach in early childhood education.

The planners and school personnel should focus on child centered curriculum for the wholesome growth and development.

There should be participation and involvement of parents in early education to improve the performance and the best outcome of child.

There should be proper comprehensive supervision of anganwadi workers so they dedicate more time to preschool educational activities. Emphasis should not be laid only on nutrition and immunization but children should also get adequate educational inputs.

The preschool education component should be strengthened by providing training and orientation to anganwadi workers. Necessary educational equipment and toys should also make available to each centre.

There should be greater community participation so that every single person comes to know about ICDS and its widening coverage.

People should treat ICDS programme as their own programme so that the impression that everything is to be done by the government be washed out.

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