

Pre-Primary Education: First Step towards Future

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Abstract

Due to rapidly changing socio-economic conditions, structure of the family also get changed; from joint families to nuclear families in which both parents are going outside for jobs and have no time for their child. To overcome this problem, urban and semi-urban areas, parents send their children to Pre- primary schools or play schools, where learning and playing go side by side. Pre-primary schools generally mean an educational establishment offering pre-primary education before the formal compulsory primary education. It is the basic level of education. It lays the foundation of knowledge in the children and enhances their personality traits. These are not only to prepare children for further schooling but also get acquainted them essential values and grooms them physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually. Play related activities are of fundamental importance for children in the former years of life. But, some modern Pre-primary schools have totally forgotten the purpose of pre-primary education and the importance of non-formal education at this level. They set their own standard, curriculum and policy. So, there is a need of universal curriculum and guidelines for these schools, as Pre-primary education is necessary for all. People still think, education means just academic development. Parents exert pressure on young kids to acquire academic skills at the age of freedom of learning. It is the age in which, a child is free to learn as a natural outcome of innate curiosity, playfulness and eagerness to experiment. The teaching methods should consist of presentation of sensory images, concrete objects and information in a pleasant way and permit them to observe and enquire about them without compelling them to memorize. Pre-primary schools should provide much needed support to parents to shape a child's personality in the formative years of life.

Keywords: Pre-primary education, Pre-primary schools, children, parents, play

Introduction

The Indian education system is as referred to 10+2+3 system or K-12. The first ten years of formal education are, theoretically, obligatory. At the age of six, children generally get admitted in primary schools. At the age of eleven, students leave lower primary schools and get admission in high schools. After four years of formal education, at the age of fourteen, they leave the high school after successfully passing school examination. At this point, first level of ten years of formal education is completed. After that those students want to pursue their education, go to senior secondary schools for higher studies, which last for two years. After completion of it, they are prepared for vocational colleges. The programme takes three years and is more related to practice than universities. They can also enroll in any university programme of three years duration. Children attend pre-primary schools before the attainment of the age of six years. These Pre- primary schools prepare children for further school life. As the formal education seems to be start at age of six, the pre-primary education is not considered as the part of formal education. So, in the absence of guidelines, there are various Pre-primary schools available with their own curriculum, infrastructure and methodology.

Due to rapidly changing socio-economic conditions, family structure also get changed; from joint families to nuclear families in which both parents are going outside for jobs and have no time for their child. As parents face the compulsion of keeping their children safe when they are out for work, with no elders to take care of their children; they turn to crèches, play schools. It happens mostly in urban and semi-urban areas. Parents are taking their children out of the home environment much earlier than ever before. Children can send to crèche up

to age of two years. After that age, parents send their children to Pre- primary schools or play schools, where learning and playing go side by side.

Pre-primary schools or Pre-schools generally means an educational establishment offering pre-primary education before the formal compulsory primary education. Some Pre-primary school allows admission of children from two to five years of age, while others from three to five years. It may be varied but, a Pre-primary school is generally expected to improve the child's ability for performing basic self-care tasks such as dressing, feeding and toileting (Wikipedia).

The Preprimary education is the basic level of education. It lays the foundation of knowledge in a child and enhances their personality traits. Pre-primary education covers all forms of organized and sustained center-based activities: such as pre-schools, kindergartens and day-care centers to foster learning, emotional and social development in children (Haque, Nasrin, Yesmin & Biswas, 2013) ^[3]. Due to the intense competition that is prevalent today in every field, parents feel the necessity to give a good head start to children right at the beginning of their educational journey. To meet this need, Pre-primary schools come into the frame and provide much needed support to parents to shape a child's personality in the formative years of life. In this increased competitiveness era, these pre- primary schools prove pre-cursor to the primary schools and boon for the working parents, which have limited time for their children. Figures from the Delhi Statistical Handbook, 2012, show that the number of students in each pre-primary schools has increased from 1,919 in 2006 to 2,972 in 2012 (Singh, 2014) ^[7].

Report of the Committee on Pre-primary and Pre-school Education in Delhi (2007) ^[5] stated the purpose of sending children to pre-primary schools is not only to prepare children for further schooling but also get acquainted them essential values and grooms them physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually. Various commissions and committees on education have given various recommendations for bringing quality in pre primary education. Kothari commission or Indian Education Commission (1964-1966) headed by Dr. D.S. Kothari, has treated the entire pre- university period of education as one stage, by recommending an integrated approach to school education. It makes pre- primary education as an integral part of schooling. The commission has identified the following objectives of Pre-primary education:

1. To develop in the child good health habits and to build up basic skills necessary for personal adjustment, such as dressing, toilet habits, eating, washing, cleaning etc.
2. To develop desirable social attitudes and manners; and to encourage healthy group participation, making the child sensitive to the rights and privileges of others.
3. To develop emotional maturity by guiding the child to express, understand, accept and control his feelings and emotions.
4. To encourage aesthetic appreciation.
5. To stimulate the beginnings of intellectual curiosity concerning the environment and to help him understand the world in which he lives; and to foster new interest through opportunities to explore, investigate and experiment.
6. To encourage independence and creativity by providing the child with sufficient opportunities for self-expression.
7. To develop the child's ability to express his thoughts and feelings in fluent, correct and clear speech.
8. To develop in the child a good physique, adequate muscular coordination and basic motor skills.

Play related activities are of fundamental importance for children in the first six years of life as health, educational and social experiences of early year determine the quality of human resource and consequently the social and economic progress of country. According to Indian Pediatrics (2004), following are main objectives of Pre-primary education:

- Physical development resulting from a well-balanced activity and rest, outdoor play, nutritious food and general hygiene inclusive of medical care
- Mental development, resulting from a rich environment, varied experiences and contact with understanding and sympathetic adults devoted to provide the necessary guidance
- Social development as a result of contact with more adults and many more children that is impossible at home
- Emotional development to take place from a richer emotional life, learning what emotional responses are acceptable to others and an advancement in the understanding of the when, why and how of emotional expression
- Educational development, meaning a better preparation for school life by the acquisition of the necessary background experience
- Parental education for the sake of enlightening the parents through parental conferences, observation and discussion of individual problems.

But, it is observed that modern pre-primary schools have totally forgotten the purpose of pre-primary education and the importance of non-formal education at this level. They impart formal education at this tender age. It is in this context that the Indian Academy of Pediatrics, had formed a sub-committee on Pre-primary school education, that have made the following recommendations and the same were summarized and published in 1999 as 'Guide to Pre-school Education ' (Nair M.K.C., 2004) ^[4].

General Recommendations

- The pre-primary age is a crucial one in the development of the child and hence a development approach instead of an educational approach must be adopted.
- Pre-primary education is not a downward extension of primary education and hence only non-formal education method must be adopted.
- Pre-primary child can express herself best in her mother tongue and hence the medium of instructions should be mother tongue.
- Some of the apparently normal looking children have developmental disabilities. They need to be integrated into normal school with special attention.
- There is no uniformity in the pattern and academic content of the Pre-primary teachers training of various Government departments as well as private sectors in India. Hence SCERT may be entrusted with the academic content of teachers training programme.

Specific Recommendations

- The selection criteria for admission should not be based on interview and testing the child
- Medical fitness and immunization certificate should not be must for admission
- Mother tongue should preferably be the medium of communication in Pre-school education
- The undue emphasis on reading and writing is detrimental to the development of a pre-school child and it should not be practiced
- The pre-Primary school activities should be based on the recommendations of NCERT
- Pre-Primary school students should not be subjected to formal examination and homework. Grading should be preferred to ranking or marking
- RTO safety regulations should be strictly followed while transporting children to and from a school
- Pre-primary school education should not be a must for admission in the first standard
- The Indian Academy of Pediatric should be involved in formulating guidelines for Pre-primary education *et al.* levels as has been done in Kerala

Pre-primary Education in National Policies and Plan

Pre-primary education is named as ECCE in our national policies and plans, which means Early Childhood Care and Education. Sheeranjan & Awathi (2010) ^[6] stated the main objectives of ECCE as:

- Promotes holistic development of child
- Prepares child for future
- Contributes in Universal Elementary Education

- Reduces wastage and stagnation

National Policy on Education (1986) laid emphasis on pre-primary education as:

- ECCE as feeder and support programme to primary schooling and as first step in the education ladder
- Emphasized need for play based and joyful ECCE
- Warned against formal teaching of the 3 R's (reading, writing and arithmetic)

Integrated Child Development Services

ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) is one of the world's unique and largest outreach programme. The government of India launched this scheme in 1975. The Department of Women and Child Development has been implementing the scheme which seeks to provide health care facilities, supplementary nutritional support and to improve children's communication and cognitive skills as a preparation for entry into primary school. It functions through community based Anganwadi Centers (AWC). It is the largest public provider of ECCE in India i.e. 76 million children below six years. Recent initiatives are:

- Universalization of ICDS: 14 million AWCs
- Pre School Kit for Rs. 1000 at every AWC which contains teaching learning material
- Introduction of new WHO child growth standards
- Revision of Teacher training curriculum
- Involvement of NGOs and Corporate

But, unfortunately, CREATE, 2010 ^[1] (Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity) did Community and School Survey and found that the quality of

teaching in Anganwadi centers is unsatisfactory due to a lack of trained teachers. The government needs to invest in an improvement of quality of services in these centers.

Constitutional Commitments

- **Article 45:** The state shall endeavor to provide ECCE for all children until they complete age of six years.
- **RTE 2009:** Right to free and compulsory education Act, 2009. Section 11 pertains to ECCE, 'With a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years, the appropriate government may take necessary arrangement for providing free pre primary education for such children.'

Advantages of Pre-Primary Schools

Most of the parents think that their child is too young to go to school. But the Pre-primary schools are specially designed and managed to set up the child of that younger age for future academic, social and emotional success. These schools lay foundation of further learning. Great Schools, a non-profit organization listed some benefits of Pre-primary schools as under:

Great Opportunity of Learning

Children experience structured setting of teacher and group of children at pre-primary schools for the first time. Here they have an opportunity to learn, to share, follow instructions and begin the foundation for learning further i.e. at primary schools. They have opportunities of learning by different activities performed at Pre-primary schools like singing, talking about favourite, reading aloud books and acting out stories etc.



Children, enjoying various interesting activities at Pre-primary school

Promote Social and Emotional Development

At very young age, a child becomes able to spend time away from parents and build trusting relationships with adults outside the family. These schools nurture warm relationships among children, teachers and parents. Teachers feel a personal close connection with each child in their care. Young children learn social skills and self-control on emotions. Teacher helps them to manage frustration or anger without shaming a child.

Learn to Take Care of Self and Others

Children's sense of competence and self-worth grow as they learn to take care of themselves and help others. Teachers appeal to a young child's desire to engage in "real work" by offering her chance to do work. For example, setting the table at lunch time, washing the hands before and after the meal, putting away toys before moving to the next activity etc. During the group activities, children learn to focus attention on the teacher, listen while others are speaking and wait their turn to speak or a teacher might ask a child, who is more competent, to help a child, who is learning.

Promote Linguistic, Cognitive and Motor Skills

At the young age of Pre-primary schools, a child's vocabulary grows from 900 to 2500 words, and sentences become longer and more complex. At schools, teachers help them to expand their linguistic skill by asking thought provoking questions and introducing new vocabulary during activities. Their cognitive skills are developed by engaging in a wide range of hands-on activities that challenge them to observe closely, ask questions, test their ideas or solve a problem. However, they are not always logical in their response. Physical activities like running, climbing, jumping and playing activity games improve motor skills. Activities like threading the beads or cutting with scissors are offered to them for developing their hand-eye co-ordination.

Nurture Curiosity

Questions are asked to children not for finding the correct answer; but, to nurture their curiosity and motivation to learn. A line between fantasy and reality is not clear to so young child. Pre- primary schools generally well stocked with costumes, "props", and child size household items such as cupboard, gas stoves, sinks and dressing table. It's often in this activity area that Pre-primary school children progress steadily from solitary play to complicated group play.

Boost Basic Skills

Pre-primary schools' activities boost the pre-math and basic literacy skills, which fulfill the academics demand of formal primary schools. Singing an alphabet song while following along in a picture book builds a child's awareness of the connections between alphabet letters and word sounds. Engaging children in a discussion about an exciting read-aloud story encourages their listening, comprehension and expressive language skills. Matching games, sorting games, counting games, and board games build children's understanding of numbers, categories and sequence, which supports later math learning.

Suggestions for Improving the Status of Pre-Primary Schools

Pre-primary education is considered to be very important as it is the first step towards entering the world of knowledge as well as a healthy and purposeful life. Pre-primary school help children in becoming more independent and confident as well as promote the all-round development of the children. But, unfortunately all the Pre-primary schools are not fulfilling the same purpose. To fulfill the basic needs of all children, here are the some more suggestions for improving the conditions of Pre-primary schools.

More Emphasis on Child's Health

All know," A sound mind rests in a sound body". It is essential to have sound health for better learning. The main emphasis should lie upon the health and nutrition of the children. Exercise and Yoga classes should be arranged so, that their stamina build up and have enough energy for learning new things. It also helps them in become habituated for yoga and exercise.

Interesting Teaching Methods

Children learn spontaneously when their interest and curiosity are awakened. A teacher should use interesting play-way

methods at pre-primary schools. Primarily, the teaching method should consist of presentation of sensory images, concrete objects and information in a pleasant way and permit them to observe and enquire about them without compelling them to memorize. Large colored flash cards should serve as low cost teaching aids. The teaching material should be customized according to individual needs and interests. Story telling method can be used for acquainting good values of beauty, harmony, peace, responsibility, honesty, truth and right conduct.

School Duration

Teaching is confined to brief periods according to every child's natural attention span which is normally 15-30 minutes daily during the first two years. It is never extended beyond that duration.

Learning by Playing Approach

For teaching at pre-primary school, a teacher should have positive attitude. The learning is a part of play at this level; it should be in fun form so that it fosters the blossoming of child's natural development. As the teaching, so the learning. Teaching learning should be made enjoyable.

Student-Teacher Ratio

The student-teacher ratio should be kept lower. By it, teacher can be able to deal each and every child personally and take care of their individual needs, interests, aptitude and potentialities.

Need Public Awareness

Pre-Primary education is not so much wide spreading. It needs public attention. People are not aware about the advantages of Pre-Primary education and its effect on the development of a child. Most of the people still think, education means just academic development. Parents exert pressure on young kids to acquire academic skills at the age of freedom of learning. It is the age in which, a child is free to learn as a natural outcome of innate curiosity, playfulness and eagerness to experiment.

Research and Funding

In India, pre-primary education still receives low priority in terms of research facilities and funding. So, it is more important to do more research studies on the children going to Pre- primary schools and its effect on their development. Government launched many programmes related to Pre-primary education like The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Financial constraints may come in the way; so, local bodies should be encouraged to come ahead for the expansion of Pre-primary education.

Development of National Framework and Policy

There is a need of national framework and policy on Pre-primary education. There should be national plan of action on pre-primary education highlighting strategies and implementation on them. By it, there would be minimum standard and universal curriculum set up for Pre-primary level.

Conclusion

Development of a child begins with the family and depends mostly on the parents. With the increasing trend of nuclear

families and a lack of family support; Pre-primary schools are gaining more importance. Researches showed that pre-primary education is necessary for all the children irrespective of their socio-economic status. It has a strong and powerful effect on further learning. Children who have been to pre-primary schools tend to learn more rapidly through an organized curriculum, learning aids and by interacting with other children. A need has been felt and recognized to regulate this segment through appropriate guidelines and administrative measures to avoid misuse and exploitation. By nurturing Pre-primary education, we would be able to set a national standard for quality pre-primary education throughout the country and develop the children as confident citizens to face the challenges of 21st century.

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