

Early Child Development - Interactive Practices by Teachers in Pakistan

M. Hameed-ur-Rehman *

Munir Moosa Sadruddin*

ABSTRACT

Early childhood development is highly critical to explore the social, moral and intellectual potentials of children. Their optimal development contributes to their promising future and can bring health changes in the families, communities and societies. Research study proves that positive experiences during early years prevent difficulties during adulthood¹. Pre-schools and child care centers play important role in promoting the social and intellectual development of children. The ongoing state of children in Pakistan and the current developmental practices with special reference to interaction amongst various Pre-School Programs / Child Care Centers is not highly appreciable. The study was conducted to explore the environment and practices, currently offered to children at pre-school level in Karachi, Pakistan. The population for the study includes all the teachers of private Preschools, Montessori's and Government Katchi classes of Garden Area in Karachi. Data was analyzed using Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale. Findings of the study clearly highlight the critical situation of early childhood environment in Pakistan. 63% of preschools rank below minimal level on the rating scale of Interaction, having Mean of 3.83. Out of 19 preschools, 06 stand at inadequate level while another 06 at minimal level. The study clearly urges the strong need of early childhood environment improvements at monitoring and program structure levels. Dearth need of attention is required to train teachers to attend the needs of early years of children in Pakistan and to provide conducive environment for their fullest development.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, early childhood development is the crucial area of interest and a subject of debate these days on the basis of the facts that millions of children across the world are facing challenges of education, healthcare, etc. Their critical condition was addressed by the United Nations on various platforms, but still, condition of children across the world is not yet improved².

All the crucial areas of development are directly or indirectly associated with the early years of education, which stimulate children's experiences and enhance their capabilities³.

Researches prove that early years of education stimulate basic aptitude skills including Math, English, language, empathy, decision making, attention, and also improve their socio-emotional development⁴.

Pakistan is also struggling to provide best possible early education to children. Its importance is endorsed by various researches in Pakistan⁵. The opportunities

* Dr., Associate Professor & Director, Hamdard Institute of Education and Social Sciences, Hamdard University, Karachi. Email: drhameedurrehman@gmail.com

** Lecturer, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi

Email: mmsadruddin@smiu.edu.pk

Date of Receipt: 12-12-2013

are highly supported and many institutions are being established to cater the needs of children. In the light of its importance and expected boost in the coming years, the Ministry of Education has also drafted National Curriculum on ECE⁶. Unfortunately, teacher training in this area is very limited in Pakistan due to which, the education system cannot facilitate productive programs for all the children.

The field of early care and education has profoundly changed in the last decade, especially in the private sector in Karachi. There is a mushroom growth of day care centers and preschools for age group of 2-5 years in Karachi. These institutions, in addition to the environment, provided at home by parents, nurture rich learning experiences⁷.

It provides educational culture and parents completely trust these institutions, particularly, working parents, who could not find much time at home, admit their children to these institutions at early age for either half or full-day. More and more young children are attending early childhood programs. The number of children in these programs continues to grow. There are distinct differences exist among the many types of early childhood programs. These programs may differ in their philosophies, ownership and program offerings⁸.

Research has shown that if the healthy environment is provided to the children, they can learn at faster pace. Teachers play important role in the whole process. They must be familiarize and should have sound qualification to fulfill learning needs of children. If teachers are familiarized with the principles of love, kindness and care, they can easily teach students at primary level⁹.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the interactive practices of teachers in Pre-Schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Q.1 What is the level of supervision by teachers while children are doing outdoor play?
- Q.2 What is the state of supervision of children by teachers during classroom activities?
- Q.3 What are the strategies used for disciplining young children in Pre-schools?
- Q.4 What is the situation of teacher child interaction in your preschool?
- Q.5 What is the condition of interaction among children in Preschool?

METHODOLOGY

A Descriptive Cross-sectional Level one inquiry method was used to investigate the topic in hand. Convenient sampling technique was utilized. The primary respondents in the study were nineteen teachers from diverse settings of preschools located in the Garden area of Karachi. These are four Government, one Home-based and fourteen private.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Early Childhood Environment Rating Sub-Scale “Interaction” Revised version was used¹⁰. The validity and reliability of the scale has been tested in many school systems with diverse group of children.

DATA ANALYSIS*Table 01: Gender of respondents*

| Sr.# | Gender | Number of Teachers | Percentage % |
|------|--------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Female | 19 | 100 |
| 2 | Male | - | - |
| | Total | 19 | 100% |

Table 02: Academic Qualification

| Sr.# | Academic Qualification | No. of Teachers | Percentage % |
|------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1 | Montessori Trained | 06 | 31.5 |
| 2 | PTC/CT | 04 | 21 |
| 3 | Intermediate/Matriculate | 09 | 47.3 |
| | Total | 19 | 100% |

Table 03: Average Score of Preschools on ECER

| Sr.# | Pre-Schools | Score | Average Score of all Preschools |
|------|-------------|-------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | A | 6.4 | 3.83 |
| 2. | B | 3.8 | |
| 3. | C | 02 | |
| 4. | D | 6.6 | |
| 5. | E | 4.2 | |
| 6. | F | 4.2 | |
| 7. | G | 5.6 | |
| 8. | H | 07 | |
| 9. | I | 2.8 | |
| 10. | J | 5.2 | |
| 11. | K | 01 | |
| 12. | L | 4.6 | |
| 13. | M | 01 | |
| 14. | N | 5.6 | |
| 15. | O | 4.6 | |
| 16. | P | 1.6 | |
| 17. | Q | 01 | |
| 18. | R | 01 | |
| 19. | S | 4.6 | |

Table 03 presents the overall mean score of 3.83 which means preschools stand on the minimal level of interaction and stimulation opportunities in these early years. Individual preschool mean is also given in the table where six of the preschool stands in the range of 5.2 to 7 mean score levels i.e. from good to excellent level. This is the picture of those preschools which have started incorporating ECD evidenced based best practices and they believe and nurture the capacity of young minds by maintaining and monitoring their interaction strategies and also invest in the professional development of their teachers.

Table 04: Average Scoring of Individual Items of ECER Subscale-Interaction of Pre-Schools in Garden Area Karachi

| | Name of Subscale: INTERACTION | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|------|
| ITEM 01 | Supervision of gross motor activities | 3.36 |
| ITEM 02 | General Supervision of children | 3.94 |
| ITEM 03 | Discipline | 3.57 |
| ITEM 04 | Staff child Interactions | 4.21 |
| ITEM 05 | Interactions among children | 4.05 |

Table 4 shows the individual mean response values for five variables of Interaction scale under study. The mean score for supervision of gross motor activities were the lowest 3.36. According to the teachers young children are not closely supervised during play and break times. Hence it predisposes a child to injuries and fights amongst children. They don't learn the skills of socialization, sharing, taking turns, and appreciation for each other. Another most sensitive and crucial element in building child confidence and esteem in early years is discipline which is of most significance; the mean score calculated is 3.57 it clearly communicates the situation of traditional methods of disciplining in preschools which predisposes a child to emotional, physical and mental abuse. Use of sticks, labeling, blaming and hurting is the typical examples. This is in fact very dangerous to the growing mind and heart. Other two variables of scale i.e. Interaction of child with staff and child to child Interaction mean score is 4.21 and 4.05. Despite of teachers being trained in either Montessori education / having certificate in teacher training the scores stands on minimal level. This indicates teaching pedagogy and how children learn is most likely not incorporated. Therefore, children grow very timid and hesitate to participate, they prefer learning through memorization. On the contrary critical thinking and expression of ideas are not encouraged. Hence children listen more, remain very quiet, don't ask questions and are passive learners. This is in fact opposite of a child learning psychology which says children learn by doing, interacting, exploring and participating. They eventually lack self-esteem and ultimately are deficient in self confidence.

Table 05: Average Score of Government, Private and Home-Based Preschools of Garden Area on ECER Subscale-Interaction

| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Govt Preschools | 02 |
| Private Home Based Preschools | 3.76 |
| Private Preschools | 4.58 |

Table 5 presents the state of different types of preschools. Government preschools or “Katchi classes” rank the lowest mean score of 02 i.e. the inadequate level. It is a very alarming situation. Since teachers of government preschools now attend professional development sessions; they have realized the importance and few of them have initiated interactive strategies. They know it is a challenge but are very passionate to embark on it. They said “Now the time has changed and we have to apply new learning; otherwise these children will not be ready for primary education and will eventually face dropouts at secondary level.”

As far as the private preschools are concerned both home based and Institutionalized, rank at the minimal level with a little difference. Home based score 3.76 and Institutions based 4.58. Private institution based preschools are progressing steadily as teachers mentioned that “Now the whole scenario of early education has changed since last few years. More and more awareness has sparked parents also; and when they admit their children will look into the preschool critically. They count on whether a particular preschool runs on the concept of early child development and importance of early years in building confidence and creativity. Therefore, private preschools now face a competitive challenge; they are now investing in material, spaces, teacher training and trying to offer child centered education.

Table 06: Present state of Preschools in Garden Area Karachi, on ECER Subscale-Interaction

| Early Childhood Environment Rating | No. of Preschools | Percentage |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Inadequate 1-2 | 06 | 31.58 |
| Minimal 3-4 | 06 | 31.58 |
| Good 5-6 | 06 | 31.58 |
| Excellent 7 | 01 | 5.26 |
| Total | 19 | 100 |

Table 6 gives a clear insight as to how much work hard is required in meeting the targets of nurturing the young minds. Out of 19 schools only one preschool celebrates the competency level “excellence”. How intense and important are these preschool years for the generations who are growing. Once their age span has gone it is difficult to build and at the same time if it is nourished nations can maximize their potential.

FINDINGS

1. There isn't any activity areas existed for children in their preschools.
2. Teachers from home-based preschools shared that since material is scarce children are not allowed to touch material, only teachers uses the material while explaining.

3. Prepared posters of alphabets, vegetables, fruits etc. are used but are not prepared according to themes and neither placed at child's eye level.
4. Very interesting to note that in private preschools where space and material is accessible but teachers don't know how to utilize. Another thing at those few schools where activity areas are present but not used for substantial portion of the day.
5. In most of the preschools children went outside in the open space just to roam around and take break at times they are not even supervised and young ones take break and get off with older children a very unsafe practice.
6. There are still very strict measures of disciplining used in majority of the Government and home-based preschools.
7. Rote learning still prevails in young children classrooms.
8. Interaction among children is very little, therefore, the level of creativity and confidence amongst young ones is not promoted.

DISCUSSION

Children need love, care, proper attention and secure learning environment. Investing in early years of education reap better outcomes¹¹. Those countries who are investing in the area of early childhood are securing future generations¹².

Early years of life provide unique opportunities to foster social behavior and nurture emotional development of children¹³. Piaget shares that during the early years, motor activity and intellectual expansion highly impact their sense of maturity. The cognitive development of children is stratified into various stages which begin from sensory motor and end at formal operational stage¹⁴.

Research proves that if children are provided with quality education from the beginning, they can acquire academic competencies by the age of eight¹⁵.

The institution and teachers, both contribute to the overall development of children¹⁶, support child learning¹⁷ and help children to understand the world around them.

The research clearly depicts the present situation of early childhood environment in the preschools of Karachi. The government has to meet the targets of achieving the induction of all Preschool to Primary level children to schooling by 2015 to meet the goals and also to honor the recommendations of Education for All (EFA).

Children love to play and it helps them to learn in a better manner. Unfortunately, due to unavailability of play space in preschools, many developmental areas can be affected. The second issue identified is lack of trained teachers at early childhood level. Creativity and interaction classrooms are missing in most of the cases. All these glimpses and many others show that the area of early childhood education is yet to be aligned through action plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following recommendations are presented on the basis of the results drawn from the analysis of data:

1. Use of complementary and varied approaches to ECD that include family and community based programs.
2. Decentralize program responsibility, with attention to building local capacity.
3. Construct culturally relevant programs with local communities rather than impose ECD practices from the center.
4. Re-examine training and supervision and provide sound training at all levels, with respect to a diversity of ECD approaches.
5. Reduce the number of children per educator.
6. Improve and reformulate curricula, taking into account not only best practices but also local definition of what constitutes best practices.
7. Establish better systems for monitoring and evaluating both children and programs.
8. Preschools should invest in educating teachers on how children learn and the importance of brain development in early years.
9. Parent seminars and sessions should also be arranged by preschools to increase the awareness of best practices in early years.
10. Government and Non-Governmental Organizations should initiate measures in mobilizing.

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