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School readiness, print awareness and parental involvement of children: Role of preschool type

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Abstract

The dynamic participation of parents in their kid's academics in the initial years of life builds the strongest foundation and smoothen the children's journey throughout their learning processes. The present study examined the role of school type (Anganwadi and Private preschool children) on the parental involvement, school readiness and print awareness of young children in preschool. Sixty subjects (30 Anganwadi children and 30 Private preschool children) between the age group of 4-5 years and their respective parents from Balangir, Odisha were randomly sampled. With regard to the group difference of both the set ups, they differed significantly favouring the private preschool in all the three measures. The results indicated that children of private preschool had better school readiness, print awareness and parental involvement than the Anganwadi children. The degree of relationship among the three measures was found to be significant and parental involvement was found as the significant predictor of both school readiness and print awareness.

Keywords: Private preschool, anganwadi, parental involvement, school readiness, print awareness and children

Introduction

Early childhood is a stage of significant growth and development when the brain develops almost to the fullest. During this period, children are extremely regulated by their environs and the population surrounding them. Jean Piaget called this phase as the preoperational stage when the kids repeatedly ask "why" about every aspect of their lives they come across. In a study, Grotewell and Burton (2008) [6] stated that children encounter life more historically than in any developmental age group. Physical changes are accompanied by rapid cognitive and language development in the child during this age.

As children grow they are sent to preschool which is a setting, attended before starting formal education. Now-a-days parents are sending toddlers to preschool around 18 months to 5 years depending upon their needs, the child and the kind of preschool. Preschools do not have formal instructions and only involve play, unstructured social activities because premature forced instruction can hinder children's natural flow of learning. In Odisha, there are two types of preschools operating the children namely, Anganwadi centres which are run by the government of Odisha and Private preschools, run by non-governmental entity or entities. Both the setups come under the category of preschool which aim at the overall growth and development of children. However, the gaps between private pre-school and Anganwadis in terms of physical settings, teachers, parents-teacher interaction, standard of teaching and so on, may influence the children's pre-literacy development compared to the kids of private preschools.

School readiness implies specific expertise and notions which if developed skilfully during preschool years, support children to enhance their social competence. It balances better when they start formal schooling and grasping the skills of literacy and numerical abilities more productively and in a more sustained manner. It means, before entering school each child should get involved in and be beneficial from early learning experiences that best aids to the child's success.

Print awareness can be defined as child's understanding about letters, print symbols and reading arrangements. For example, having knowledge about, print is read from left to right, top to bottom and about which page is read first, identifying front and back of the book and so on.

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It involves learning that words are composed of letters and that spaces exist between words. Toddlers entering formal schooling are presumed to have acquired these skills for reading achievements. Adams (1990) [1] stated that print awareness is a significant impetus of early reading achievement.

Amongst the varying types of bonds we build over the course of our life-span, the affinity between parents and child is the most crucial. Both father and mother create the environment and experiences in which learning takes place, which makes them the first teachers, their children will ever have. At the end of the day, the most immense solution is the positive participation of parents. Dixon (1992) [4] identified that parental involvement in any form, originates significant benefits in academic achievement. Parental involvement is recognized as having a vital impact on children's educational success during early phase of education (Jeynes, 2007) [7]. Active involvement of parents in children's education can result in better reading, writing and overall behaviour (St. Clair & Jackson, 2006; Reutzal *et al.*, 2006 & Domina, 2005) [10, 9, 5].

Early childhood is one of the sensitive periods of life-span in which both parents and pre-schools play crucial roles for the child's overall growth and development. During this age the brain of the child develops and parental involvement is more likely to shape young children's school readiness and print awareness more efficiently. The present study is an attempt to yield further knowledge about parental involvement and the advancement of school readiness and print awareness skills of preschool children. This will assist in identifying the nature of parental involvement and its relationship with children's school readiness and print awareness and if required, accordingly intensive intervention strategies can be organised and implemented to promote parental involvement among them.

Objectives

1. To examine the role of preschool type (Anganwadi and private) in school readiness, print awareness and parental involvement of children.
2. To explore the linkages among school readiness, print awareness and parental involvement of Anganwadi and private preschool children.

Design

The study involved one independent variable namely, pre-school type (Anganwadi and Private preschool) of the subjects. The dependent measures were children's school readiness, print readiness and the parental involvement.

Sample

The sample of the study consisted of 60 subjects (30 Anganwadi children and 30 private preschool children) age ranging from 4-5 years old. Subjects were selected randomly from different Anganwadi centres and Private preschool of Balangir, Odisha. Written informed consent was taken from.

Tools

1. School Readiness Instrument (The World Bank, India, 2009)

The instrument consisted of 10 different tasks. The tasks involved fundamental skills and concepts related to number, space, shape, quantity, sequencing and pattern, ability to

follow instructions, vocabulary and sentence meaning, phonetic awareness and phonics knowledge. The time limit to complete the tasks was 30 minutes. The internal consistency was found to be good and the reliability of the instrument ranged from 0.85 to 0.87. The scoring of children's responses was done according to a rubric and then the total score was calculated. The maximum score was 40. The higher the score, the better was the school readiness of the child.

2. Print Awareness Scale (Clay, 2000) [3]

The questionnaire consisted of eight items. Out of eight items six items were taken depending upon the appropriateness of the items of the scale. There was no time limit. The maximum score was 11. This knowledge helps children to move forward in comprehending how print works.

3. HOME, Preschool version (Caldwell & Bradly, 1984) [2]

Cadwell and Bradly developed home observation for the measurement of Environment (HOME), pre-school version in 1984. There were 3 sections to this interview schedule. Section-A related to personal information, Section-B contained family information, and Section-C consisted of 8 subscales with a total of 60 statements concerning the home environment of the child. Section-C consisted of 8 subscales. On the basis of the investigator's observation of child's home environment, parental interview, and child's responses, each statement was ticked as either 'Yes' or 'No'. Each 'Yes' answer earned a score of '1'. In the present study, subscales I, II, III, V, VI and VIII were taken, that were stimulation through toys, games, reading materials, language stimulation, daily stimulation, stimulation of academic behaviour, pride, affection, warmth and avoidance of physical punishment respectively.

Procedure

The investigator took permission from different Anganwadi centres and the private preschool for the participation of children. The very purpose of the research was explained to the Anganwadi workers and the principal of private preschool and they were assured of the confidentiality of the data. Adequate amount of rapport was established with all subjects before starting the activities. The investigator also met the parents of each child and assured them about the confidentiality of the data.

Results

This research aimed to identify the association between parental involvement, school readiness and print awareness of Anganwadi and Private preschool children. Test scores of children from both the set ups were statistically analysed by Means, t-values and Inter-correlation. Results are given below.

Table 1: Mean and SDs and t values of School readiness, Print awareness and Parental involvement in Anganwadi and Private preschool set ups

Variables	Anganwadi		Private pre-school		t values
	M	SD	M	SD	
School readiness	15.73	3.79	32.30	5.90	12.93***
Print awareness	3.70	2.08	8.67	1.47	10.65***
Parental involvement	14.46	2.31	29.53	5.19	14.50***

*** $p < .001$

Table 1 showed that both the schools namely, Anganwadi and private pre-school children differed significantly in their school readiness ($t=12.93$, $df= 58$, $p<.001$), print awareness ($t=10.65$, $df= 58$, $p<.001$) and parental involvement

($t=14.50$, $df=58$, $p<.001$). Comparison of mean scores of both the set ups indicated that private preschool had better school readiness, print awareness and higher parental involvement than the Anganwadi centres.

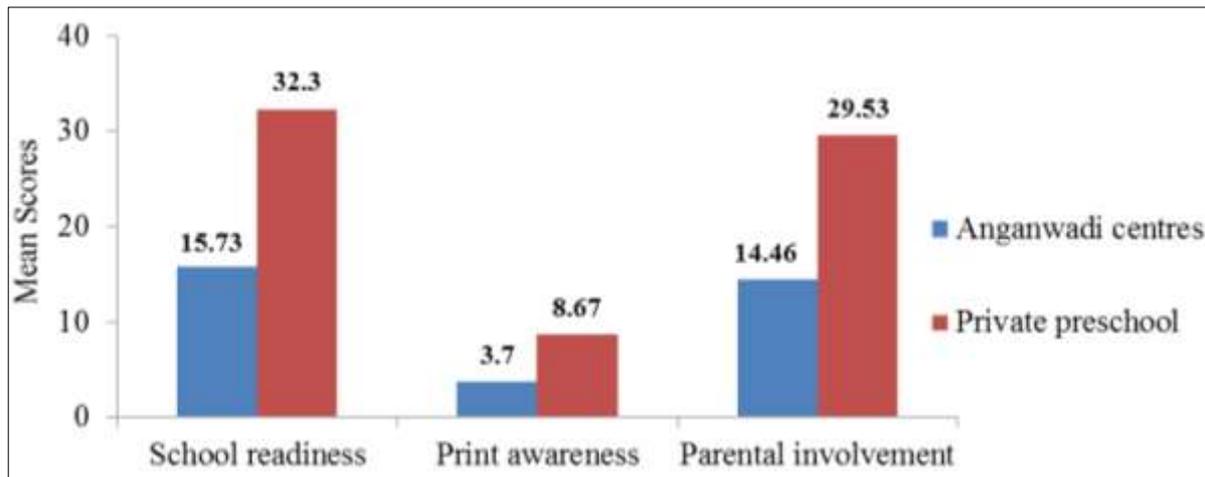


Fig 1: Showing the mean scores of School readiness, Print awareness and Parental involvement in Anganwadi and Private preschool set ups

Table 2: Inter – correlation among school readiness, print awareness and parental involvement

Variables	School readiness	Print awareness	Parental involvement
School readiness		.81***	.85***
Print awareness			.78***
Parental involvement			

** $P<0.001$

Table 2 showed that there was a significant positive relationship between school readiness and print awareness of subjects ($r=.81$, $df= 58$, $p<.001$). A high positive correlation was found between school readiness and parental involvement ($r=.85$, $df=58$, $p<.001$). Moreover, a significant relationship was also marked between print awareness and parental involvement ($r=.78$, $df=58$, $p<.001$).

Discussion

The significant group difference between both the set ups was observed from the results of study on all the three measures, namely school readiness, print awareness and parental involvement, favouring the private preschool. In private preschool set up, adequate teachers are there and they predominantly focus on the cognitive, emotional and social development of children. Here, children are exposed to a variety of stimuli to amplify their school readiness in certain areas of social interaction, play, music, pictures, language, emotional development, physical skills, literacy, and fine motor skills. In this set up, teachers are conscious about whether the children are coming to the class regularly or not and also about their rate of progress and performance. Their teaching practice is quite advanced and they follow reading-writing method. But in case of Anganwadi set up, there is only one teacher who teaches a number of children of three to five years of age at the same time. Here, children are exposed to limited stimuli, which may contribute to lower school readiness in comparison to the private preschools.

Results revealed that print awareness of the private preschool children was higher than the children of Anganwadi centres. Children with print awareness realise that print constitutes words; those have specific meanings and are linked to spoken language. For developing this

awareness, toddlers of private schools are taught alphabets through stimulating materials like ABC bracelets, tactile letter cards, play dough mats etc. The children are provided with extra storybooks containing various stories with pictures and they are frequently encouraged by the teachers as well as their parents to read aloud and to pronounce well. These schools make various paintings of famous cartoon characters and writings like alphabets or small rhymes in their walls which may strengthen their children's print awareness than the Anganwadis.

It was also evident from the study that involvement of parents was higher in case of private preschool children than the children of Anganwadis. This may be due to the reason that private schools maintain teacher-parents interaction to make parents more involved in the pre-literacy development of the children. Generally, most of the parents of these preschool are well-educated. They may better understand the value of education and become more conscious about the academics and future of the child since preschool age. Their education may increase their self-efficacy because of which parents become more likely to get involved in their children's education exuberantly and may become more ascertained about overcoming hindrances in the path of their children's conquest. Besides these, parents may realise that they are expending enough money on their children's school and this thought may motivate them to devote time and energy to the kids' education as much as possible.

Results indicated a significant degree of relationship among the three variables namely, school readiness, print awareness and parental involvement. Parental involvement is the basic strategy which plays a significant role in the overall development including cognitive development of young children during preschool age. Parents, especially mother is the first teacher of the child. So when the child

begins to learn, it is the participation of parents with children in different activities along with their academics which can shape their further learning. This ultimately leads to better outcome in terms of pre-literacy skills. Similarly, those who have lower engagements in their children's literacy development; it leads to lower outcome of their children's performance. This finding is supported by Lau *et al.* (2011) [8] who stated that parental involvement is highly correlated with overall readiness for school.

The early childhood years are crucial to a child's total development, providing the base for school and success in life. In Western set ups, maybe education is more a kind of social practice whereas in Indian society, particularly, children going to the Anganwadi centres belong to the low strata. Parents they do not have a clear role regarding child's educational development. So unless it is emphasized, this practise may continue for a longer period of time. Parental awareness programs are to be built up as an integral part of the school education. More home visits by the Anganwadi teachers and workers to the homes of children will definitely facilitate a change in the home environment in a better manner and enhance the parental involvement. All these may create interest in the parents that they can also participate in the child's activity. Telling the significance of storytelling, making things such as low cost materials available to home may be helpful because parents don't have the knowledge that this will be very crucial in child's development. So if that message can be conveyed to the parents because they are not properly literate, ultimately that will be reflected in the child's progress. In case of Anganwadi system, some environment is created for preschool education of children, for the community participation. But parents don't get any message from the Anganwadis what they need to focus on. So maybe because the study's result obtained in this manner that parental involvement is a high predictor of school readiness as well as print awareness if this message is to be conveyed to all the parents it will facilitate change in them.

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