

Study of the Parents' Perspective Regarding Pre-Schooling

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Abstract

Preschool is the crucial first step in a child's education. Parents are a part of the education system as are the children, teachers and staff. Nowadays, parents' participation is considered to be the main aspect of pre-school education. As per Sylva, et al (2010) in the early education of children, parental support is also important for the parents are the first educators of the child. They further said children learn best through "sustained shared thinking." This has a considerable influence on the development of the foundation stage. Ziglar (2006: p15) says "children acquire the most important skills for kindergarten readiness best by experiencing the first years of their life in a loving home environment where they receive individual attention from and nurturing from a parent". When parents take an active role in their child's education, learning becomes easy for the child and they easily adapt to the change. Parental involvement can be increased and supported when parents have positive views about their child's pre- schooling. The present paper is based on the study that sought to assess the understanding and perception of pre-school education by the parents. This paper makes an attempt to inform about the variations in the reasons of the parental choices for pre-school education of their young children. It also examines in detail their awareness regarding pre-school education and perception regarding the benefits it accrues.

Key Words: Pre-schooling, Perceptions, Preschool Education

Introduction

Early childhood is a period for significant brain development that sets the foundation for later learning. Early experiences influence their brain development and establish neural connections that provide the basis for language, reasoning, problem solving, social skills, behavior and emotional health. One of the most important partners is parents, thus, and their views about preschool education influence success of preschool education. Preschool is a crucial first step in a child's education.

Parents and society are a part of the education system as are the children, teachers and staff. Nowadays, parents' participation is considered to be a main aspect of early childhood curriculum models such as the Turkish early childhood programme (MEB, 2006). Parental involvement can be increased and supported when parents have positive views about their children's schooling. Therefore, preschool institutions when planning their programme schedules and implementation should consider their views and expectations. Parents' views or expectations regarding pre-schooling have been assessed in a theoretical context by some researchers.

Ziglar (2006:p15) says” children acquire the most important skills for kindergarten readiness best by experiencing the first years of their life in a loving home environment where they receive individual attention from and nurturing from a parent. When parents take an active role in their child's education, learning becomes easy for the child and they easily adapt to the change. Researchers in the field and pre-school educators, both view the parents as an integral part of the pre-school education process. Often educators refer to parents as the child's first and best teacher. As per Sylva, et al (2010) in the early education of children , parental support is also important for the parents are the first educators of the child. They further said children learn best through “sustained shared thinking.” This has a considerable influence on the development of the foundation stage. Surprising Sahin et al (2013) found that as per the views of university graduate parents, it could be considered that they were not aware of the critical periods in children's lives in terms of education and development.

Sahin et al (2013) in their study also found that approximately half of parents emphasized that preschool education was important because it enhanced the social skills of their children and prepares them for the next levels of education. Also, most of the parents expected preschool to enhance young children's social skills. Also, although parents are aware of the appropriate characteristics of preschool institutions, they did not have a general and consistent view related to age at which a young child should begin preschool education.

Another different aspect that was established by Barnard .W.M (2001) from her review of pre-school education and intervention literature were that early interventions could lead to less home-school communication and involvement later on. Furthermore, she further pointed out that these experiences can affect parents' current and future beliefs and practices. Compared to non-preschool parents, parents of children who participated in preschool activities had higher occupational aspirations for their children, more satisfaction with their children's school performance, and greater parent involvement in elementary years at home and in school. Her research, however, did not explore ways to cement the relationship of parents and children. Preschool factors positively affecting later home and school involvement included the number of years of preschool, as well as follow-on activities once the children reached the school age.

Vesely. C, (2011) explored how mothers' experiences in their countries of origin (COO) coupled with experiences in the U.S. shaped their ideas of parenting, and finally, how mothers learned to navigate the early care and education (ECE) system. Field observations and semi-structured interviews with 41 immigrant mothers with children enrolled in ECE programs in the Washington, DC area revealed that mothers' immigration stories influenced their expectations of parenting in the U.S. Mothers drew from parenting ideas and practices in their COO and from the U.S. to create new distinct parenting ideas and practices; and mothers sometimes faced obstacles to securing ECE but gained important social capital as a result of utilizing ECE.

Now that there is increasing emphasis on pre-school education for the development of their children, but there is a challenge towards implementation of this in a true sense. The pre-school,

child and parents cannot be treated in isolation from each other. The challenge is the parents' knowledge and understanding of the significance of pre-school education. Specifically the beliefs and understanding of the parents regarding pre-school education have an impact on kind of expectations of parents of the pre-school education.

The present paper is based on the study that sought to assess the understanding and perception of pre-school education by the parents. This research makes an attempt to inform about the variations in the ways parents make choices for their young children, based on their understanding of this level of education. The study examined the awareness of pre-school education and the benefits it brings to children, so that it can bring necessary cooperation between parents and teachers and all other stakeholders, who in turn influence the evaluation of the standard and provision of pre-school education.

Objectives, Research Questions and Methodology

The objectives of this study are to:

- Know the interpretation of the term 'pre-school education' by the parents.
- Examine awareness of the benefits of the pre-school education among parents
- Examine cooperative partnership if any between parents and teachers in the provision of pre-school education.
- Evaluate the relevance of current provision for pre-school care and education and development for children
- Suggest the standards for pre-school education that parents will be satisfied with.

The study was designed to answer the following questions:

- What does pre-school education mean to the parents?
- What are the factors that parents consider in choosing a school for their children?
- What are the benefits of pre-school education to children?
- What skills are acquired from pre-school education?

- What teaching approach do parents prefer?
- What was the parent's initial reason for sending their children to pre-school?

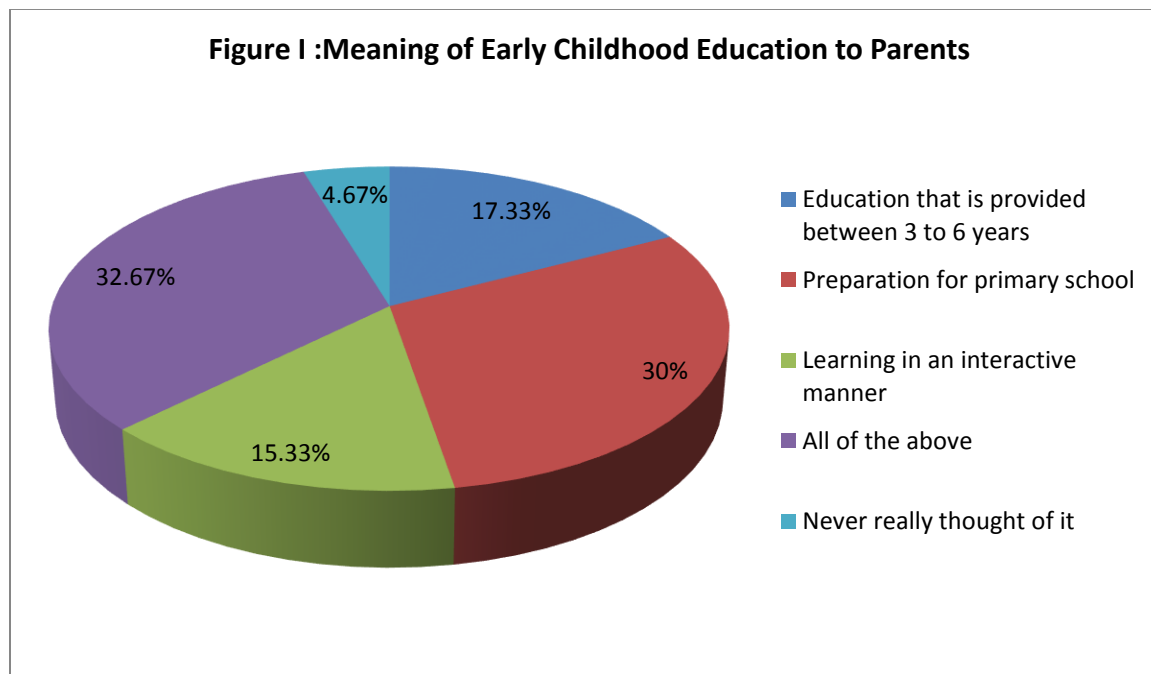
The researcher chose a highly populated residential area in the South District of Delhi. This area was chosen because of its unique composition of people with different background, education and income capabilities. Therefore, it was easy to find information from all the types of the parents needed for this research as it was felt that the findings from such a sample can be justifiably generalized. The Sample of the study consisted of 3 pre- schools. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools to ensure that a fair representation of the pre-schools as per the criteria was done. Criteria for selection followed were:

- One Branded Pre-school
- One Experimental Pre-school
- One Small Pre-school set up by an Individual proprietor

The random sampling technique was used for selection of the sixty parents of the pre-school children.

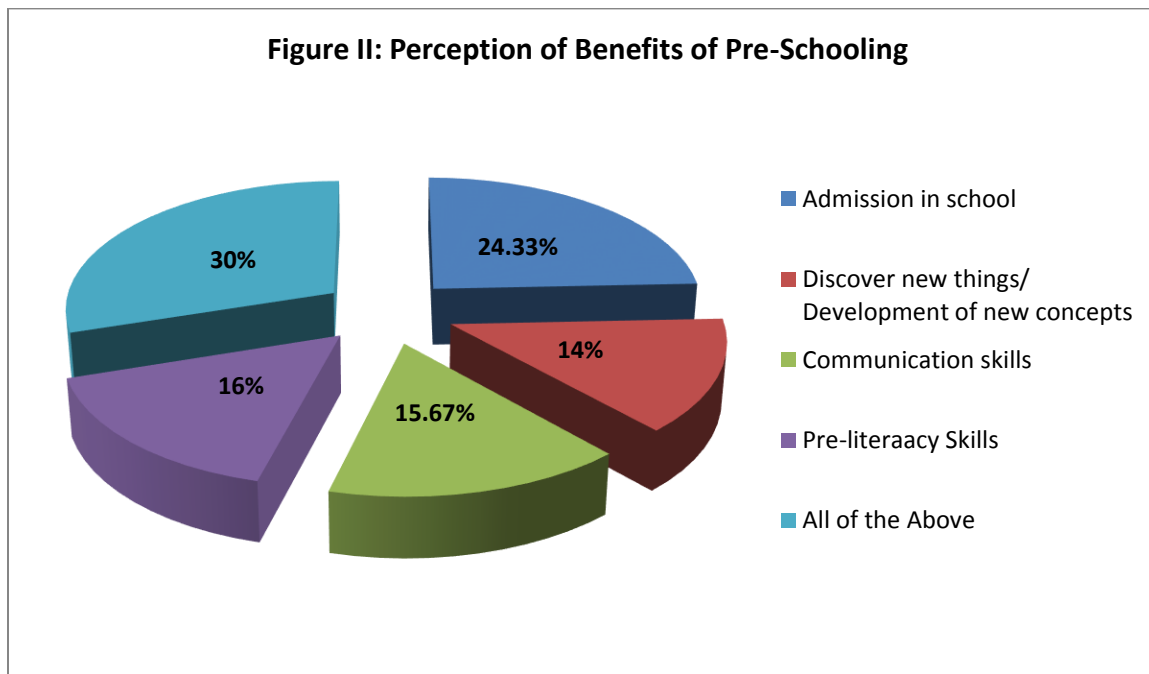
The researcher prepared questionnaires for collecting information from parents. Interview schedule was constructed for conducting interviews of parents. In addition to these, separate schedule was also prepared for conducting focus group discussions with parents. The researcher developed data collection instruments taking into consideration validity and reliability issues. It was a conscious decision not to video record sessions to interviews and interactions with the parents so that they were not nervous and conscious.

Findings of the Study



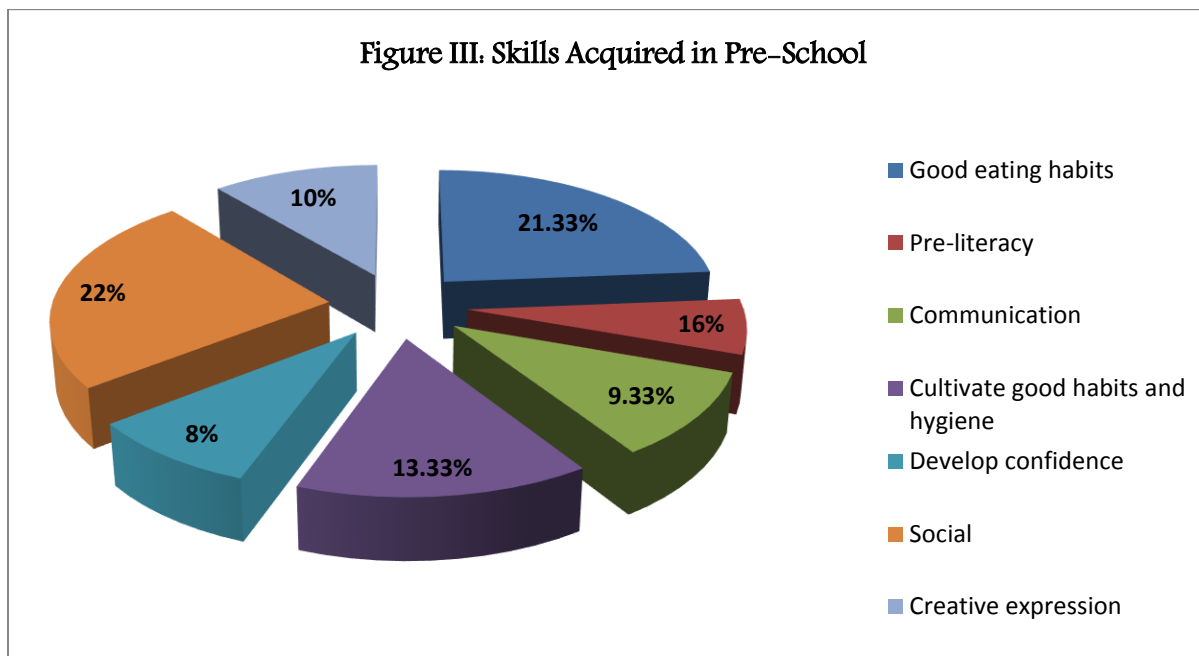
The findings indicated differences in the opinion of parents regarding the meaning of pre-school education. For nearly one-third of the (30%) parents, pre-school was the initial preparatory step towards formal primary schooling. They believed that children who attend any type of preschool centre are 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. Few parents felt that it was either concept of time bound education which specifically catered to the needs of 3 to 6 years old (17.33%) or learning in an interactive manner (15.33%). One-third of the parents (32.67%) saw pre-school education as a combination of all the above mentioned different benefits. However, a very small percentage (4.67%) never really had thought about the meaning of pre-school education.



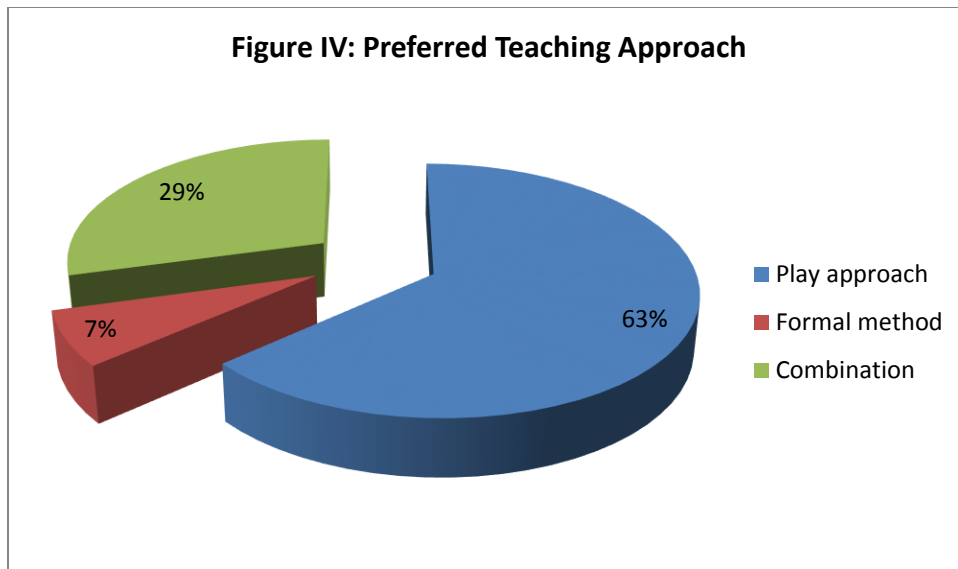
Regarding the benefits of pre-school education, nearly one-fourth of the parents (24.33%) perceived that it led to the development of new concepts. Some parents (16%) felt that it led to the development of pre-literacy skills. According to them children must first learn early literacy concepts as it could help them to face the later years with more confidence and ease. Some parents (14%) felt that in preschool centre children get an opportunity to discover and experiment new things by exploring the environment and develop different concepts too. And

most of the parents perceived 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 (16.67%). About one-third of the parents (30%) thought that children get multiple benefits from pre-school education in terms of school admission, development of new concepts, discovering new things, development of communication and pre-literacy skills.

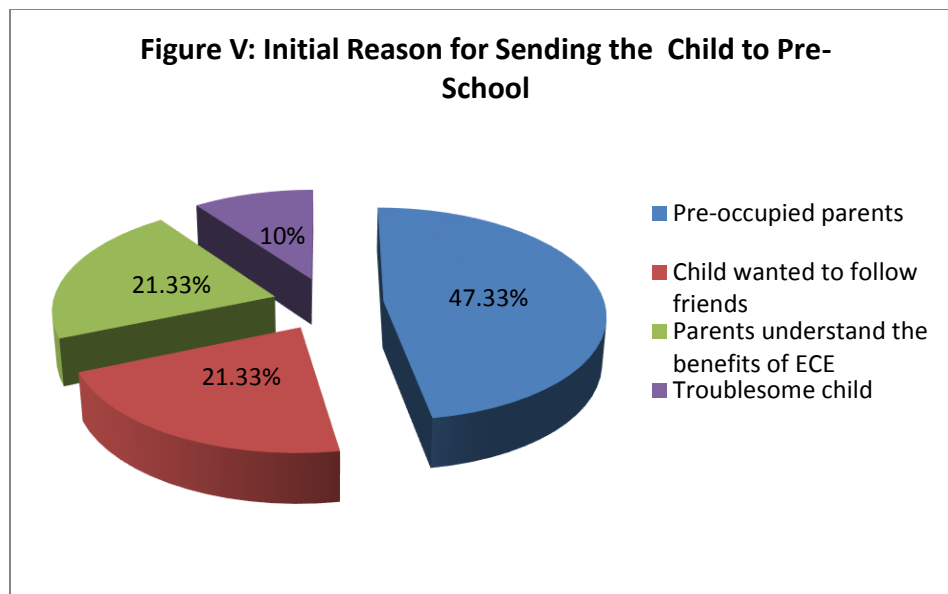


Data reveals that some parents (13.33%) felt that children who attend pre-school centre cultivate good health and hygiene habits. According to them whatever the child learns and cultivates at this stage get deeply embedded and has a profound influence on their overall personality. This has been attributed to the persistence of the teachers who instructs children to wash their hands before eating; this is also reinforced, with the peer's availability.

Some parents had visualized that when children attend pre-school centre they develop good eating habits (21.33%) and also pre-literacy concepts related to color, shape, texture, numeracy and also learn differentiation, identification and classification of things (16%). They also learn to communicate (9.33%), develop creative expression (10%) and individuality skills like confidence (8%).



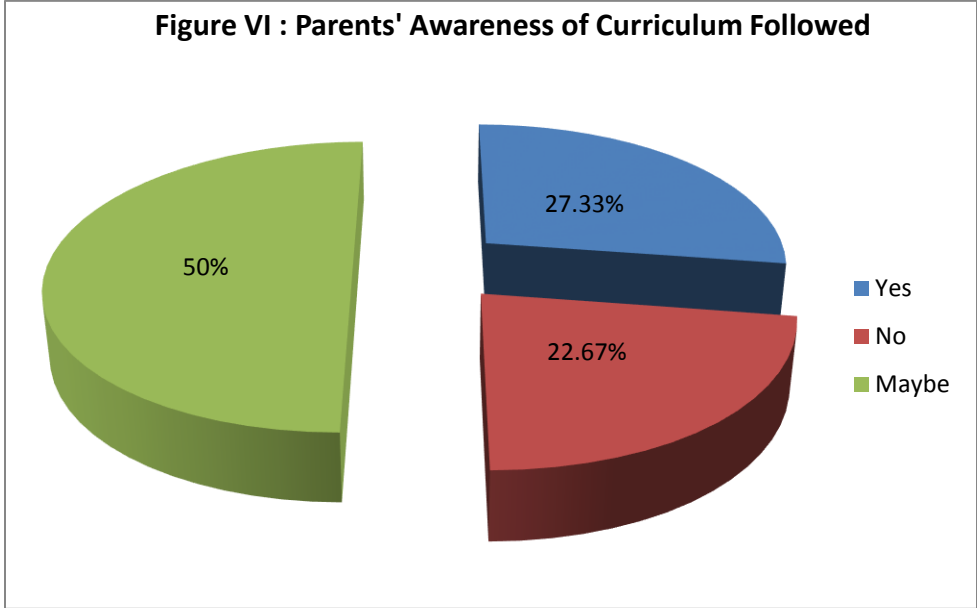
Nearly two-third of the parents (63%) perceived that play way approach is the best method for teaching in pre-school. It helps the children to learn and retain things for a longer time and also feel less boredom. According to this group when pre-school education is imparted through play way method, it becomes more effective and enhances the children’s potential for overall development. A little more than one-fourth of the parents (29.33%) however, preferred a combination of formal and plays way method as a better method of teaching. According to them some concepts that 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, and may take this tendency to primary school. A few felt that the teaching approach should be formal. There view was that since children are always playing as such this should give them time to be trained to act formal



Nearly half of the parents (47.33%) sent their children to pre-school simply because they were pre-occupied with different issues and could not attend to them. The issues ranged from work, business, another child on the way and leading to a situation the child will have no one to stay with at home. A little more than one-fifth of them (21.33%) sent the child to pre-school because all his /her friends were going to school, so he sort of had no friends to play with at home. Another little more than one-fifth (21.33%) of the parents sent the child to pre-school because of the importance and benefits of pre-school education. One-tenth (10%) of the parents (10%) revealed that the reason they sent their child to pre-school education centre was because the child proved to be troublesome as such, they saw the time the child will spend at the centre as a relief to them.

According to a review of NCF, the curriculum is the sum total of all experiences available to the child, and it cannot be reduced to a syllabus (Sultana, 2009). Need for an appropriate curriculum has been reiterated through the National Curriculum Framework- 2005. Curriculum for children under six should be aimed at their better cognitive development, language development, socio-

emotional development, physical and motor development, development of creativity and inculcation of healthy habits. Interestingly, in a study conducted by the NCERT (1998), it was found that in almost all the selected ICDS centers, there was a virtual absence of any play activities. In this context, it is important that the parents should also be aware of the curriculum that is being followed in the pre-school.



Another important question was trying to see how keen parents were about their children's education and how much involved they were. Half of the parents were not sure as to whether the school followed an established curriculum or not. A little more than one-fourth of them (27.33%) were aware that there is a curriculum in place that was being followed. Nearly one-fourth of the parents (22.67%) said there was no curriculum that was being followed at all in their child's pre-school.

Conclusion

The parents had a variety of notions regarding the meaning of pre-school education. It is the initial preparatory step towards primary schooling. For a good number of them it was an education that was provided to children between 3 to 6 years. 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. Many parents thought that children get multiple benefits from pre-school education in terms of admission to school, discovering new things, development of new concepts, communication and pre-literacy skills. 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 other and express their views and ideas with each others, peer power plays a significant role here as well. Attending preschool would assist in preparing their young children to interact with others.

Findings of this study corroborate 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.

Majority of parents felt that when children attend pre-school centre they cultivate good health and hygiene habits. Findings also elucidate that majority 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 as it helps the children to learn and absorb things quickly and get more enjoyment out of it. But some were of the view that it should be a combination approach involving play way and formal method. Interestingly, some favored only the formal method of instruction.

It is well known that pre-school has a major role to play in the all-round development of the children. It cannot be narrowly understood and just confined to the four walls of a classroom. It

should be connected to the parents and community and linked to the primary school as per the requirement.

Recommendations

From above discussions, the following recommendations can be made:

- There is a need to create awareness among parents regarding the pre-school education as many of them lack knowledge of what truly pre-school education is.
- Effectively involve parents and the community in the Education of their children.
- There is a need for a well-outlined child centered curriculum, which will be uniform to all pre-school education centres.
- There is a need for supervision from government and regulatory bodies to keep the standards high. During the study, the researcher visited all the three pre-schools, and no school is the same as the other. It was also noticed in some aspects in one of the pre-schools, the standards have been highly compromised.
- Parent teacher relationship should be strengthened in all pre-school education centres.

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