

A STUDY TO ASSESS THE QUALITY OF CLASSROOM PRACTICES EXECUTED AND CHALLENGES FACED BY PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS.

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Abstract

“Children are like wet cement. Whatever falls on them makes an impression”

“Dr. Hiam Ginnot”

The National Policy on Education (1986) (Government of India, 1986) and its plan of action, (Government of India, 1992) have placed immense importance on pre-school education. It is the pre-school where most striking changes in behavior are linked to the child's growing sense of his/her identity. According to Erickson (1950), it is during this time that the child develops autonomy, learns to choose and decides to accept the consequences of choice. It is in these years of life that one's development can be guided towards the highest potential and determines what one will be, (Hurlock; 1978). Pre-school teachers play an important role in building a child's success in their first years of school. Considering importance of pre-schools teachers in development of future children researchers took up this study. The current study is set out to find the quality of classroom practices followed and challenges faced by pre-school teachers. With regard to the above mentioned aim, classroom observation and interview of 31 pre-school teachers was conducted by the researchers. Further, in this study, the researchers made use of the researcher developed classroom observation rubric to assess the quality of classroom practices. Interview was conducted to identify areas of professional development and challenges faced by pre-school teachers. Classroom observation rubric included areas like introduction, communication skills, guided practice, assessment, use of strategies and so on. Researcher rated the teachers on a three point scale and scores out of 30 was given to teachers. Quantitative data was analyzed using percentage and qualitative data obtained from interview was analyzed using grounded theory. During the interview teachers were asked teaching – learning areas which they want to improve or learn more about and difficulties they face as pre-school teachers. Major findings of the study were that majority of the pre-school teachers are good at providing instructions, fulfilling their professional duties, providing support to the learners and use of communication skills. Pre-school teachers were also good at applying the concepts learned in the classroom with the daily life of the students. Interview revealed that teachers wanted to know more about areas like multiple intelligences, questioning techniques, assessment techniques, differentiated instructions etc. Pre-school teachers also shared major hindrances in their professional development and practices.

Keywords: Classroom practices, Pre-school Teachers, Challenges and Quality

Introduction:

“The goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child’s own natural desire to learn.”

- Maria Montessori

The first three to six years play a key role in a child’s life as they begin to absorb the world around them and develop. Global brain research also informs us about the significance of early years for brain development. The experiences that children have early in their lives affect their physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. Children develop the healthiest when they are provided environments in which they can explore the world around them, play with others, and learn to speak and listen to others. To ensure the future success of a child, it is important to provide a strong start by providing experience which are based on sound theoretical foundations and are developmentally appropriate.

Preschool is an important stage which lays the foundation for life-long learning and all round development of the child. It is also the starting point of formal education. It enables the child to be better prepared to meet not only the immediate challenges of the primary education but also of life-long learning. Figure 1 below shows the skills developed in young children through pre-schooling:



Figure 1: Qualities developed in a preschool

Historical Background: Many eminent philosophers, psychologist and educationist have contributed to the early years education through their views.

Western thinkers like Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, and Montessori, have been pioneers in the movement of early childhood education. Dewey believed that the child's own instincts, activities, and interests should be the starting point of education; Froebel believed that action and direct observation were the best ways to educate children. Their insights into the importance of exploration and play, art,

rhythm, rhyme, movement, and active participation of the child led to the inclusion of these elements in classroom dynamics.

Indian thinkers Gandhi, Tagore, Aurobindo, Gijubhai Badekha, and Tarabai Modak were the first Indians to conceptualize a child-centered approach to the care and education of young children. They were of the view that education must be imparted in the child's mother tongue and should be connected with the child's social and cultural environment and the community should be actively involved in the learning process.

In more recent times, scholars in Developmental Psychology and Child Development like Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky, Urie Bronfenbrenner and Gardner have further emphasised, based on their research, play and activity as the child's natural modes of learning and that children living and learning in multiple social and cultural contexts influence children's learning and development. Piaget emphasized that children constructed their knowledge by assimilating the experiences and then accommodating within their own understanding. Vygotsky viewed that children are actively engaged in social and cultural experiences and there is active interaction between children and more experienced others in the process of learning and development. Further Jerome Bruner proposed that children represent information and knowledge in their memory in three different but interrelated modes such as action-based, image based and language/symbol based

Need of the study:-

According to Nobel Laureate and Professor James J, Heckman, Ph.D, "Early childhood interventions of high quality have lasting effects on learning and motivation." This means that providing preschool learning opportunities to the child ensures learning and development take place hand in hand has lifelong benefits for academic success and more. A child who experiences the joy of learning, of discovery, and of successfully completing age-appropriate tasks at a young age will be more likely to enjoy school later in life, and do better academically as well.

When given the opportunity to do things on his/her own or with a group, the child is learning important work attributes that are necessary in his future. The preschool setting can be a strong foundation for a successful school/work career making it easier to enjoy a fulfilling life.

Preschool education provides child with an opportunity to start a lifelong love of learning. With the use of age-appropriate materials and objectives, can help child to practice skills, lay the framework for more advanced learning, and most importantly discover that learning is fun. The motivation to learn is an important factor in school success.

A preschool teacher works with the children who are between age-group 3 to 6 years. Preschool education provides the foundation for later development. A child at this stage particularly needs a teacher who has the necessary sensitivity, understanding, knowledge and skills to handle and stimulate young children. Teachers use a variety of methods to help children grow cognitively, as well as conceptually. A positive relationship with preschool teachers can make an exponential difference in a child's success as they continue through elementary school.

In addition to being knowledgeable about the subjects they teach, preschool teachers must have the ability to communicate, inspire trust and confidence, and motivate students, as well as an

understanding of the students' educational and emotional needs. Preschool teachers must be able to recognize and respond to individual and cultural differences in students and employ different teaching methods that will result in higher student achievement. They should be organized, dependable, patient, and creative. Teachers also must be able to work cooperatively and communicate effectively with other teachers, support staff, parents, and members of the community. Therefore the personality of the teacher is a crucial determinant of a preschool programme.

Being teacher educators we have visiting schools for lesson observations during which we found that few schools preschool teachers were not up to the mark.

This raised the following questions in the mind of the researcher:

- How is the quality of preschool teachers and their classroom practices?
- What are the expectations or problem faced by preschool teachers?

In an attempt to answer all the above questions, the researchers took up the present research.

Statement of the problem:- To assess the quality of classroom practices executed and challenges faced by preschool teachers teaching in Preschools.

Definition of Key Terms and Phrases:

Conceptual Definitions:

- **Preschool:** Pre-school is used to describe things relating to the care and education of children before they reach the age when they have to go to school. (English Dictionary, <https://dictionary.reverso.net/english-cobuild/preschool+teacher>)
- **Challenges:** A challenge is something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination. (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/challenge>)
- **Quality:** The quality of something is how good or bad it is. (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/challenge>)
- **Executed:** To do or perform something, especially in a planned way. (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/executed>)

Operational Definitions:

- **Classroom Practices:** The classroom activities used by the preschool teachers in the classroom for teaching children.
- **Preschools Teachers:-** Teachers teaching from Nursery to Kindergarten in preschools under MIT banner located in Kothrud, Pandharpur, Solapur, Barshi and Loni Kalbhor

Objectives of the Research:

1. To observe classroom practices of pre-school teachers.
2. To determine the quality of pre-school teachers
3. To identify areas of improvement needed by pre – school teachers

Method of Study: Multi method was used. For the first objective classroom observations were done and in order to identify the areas interview was conducted.

Population: All preschool teachers teaching children from 3 to 6 years in schools of Maharashtra.

Sampling Method: Incidental Sampling

Sample Size: 31 preschool teachers teaching in schools under MIT Banner were considered for the study.

Scope

- The research is concerned with preschool education.
- Preschool teachers from areas like Solapur, Barshi, Pandharpur, Loni Kalbhor and Kothrud were considered for the study.

Delimitations

- The study was delimited to preschool teachers teaching in schools under MIT.
- The study was delimited to English medium schools only.

Limitations

- The motivation levels, fatigue, mood, past experience of the preschool teachers which may affect their responses were beyond the control of the researcher.

Tools for Data Collection: Classroom observation tool was used to observe the lessons of preschool teachers. Description of the rubric is as follows

Sr.No.	Item number	Type										
1	Total 10 areas	4 point rating scale was used										
2	Rating scale description	<table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Score</th> <th>Grade</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>Poor</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>Satisfactory</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>Good</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>Excellent</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Score	Grade	1	Poor	2	Satisfactory	3	Good	4	Excellent
Score	Grade											
1	Poor											
2	Satisfactory											
3	Good											
4	Excellent											
3	Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides introduction • Provides instructional output • Checks for students understanding • Provides guided practice • Uses effective communication skills • Professional Responsibilities • Manages materials & students • Maintains supportive environment • Maintains classroom appropriately • Uses strategies 										

- **Interview questions for teachers:** Post classroom observations interview of preschool teachers was conducted. Aim of the interview was to find out problems faced by the preschool teachers in day to day teaching. A list of areas was given to them which they would like to improve themselves as teachers. List is as follows:

- ✓ Designing Effective Lessons
- ✓ Classroom Management
- ✓ Learning Readiness
- ✓ Multiple Intelligences
- ✓ Questioning Techniques
- ✓ Special needs

- ✓ Collaborative Learning
- ✓ Circle Time
- ✓ Different Assessment Techniques
- ✓ Intervention Strategies

Data Analysis of classroom observations:

➤ The quantitative data obtained from classroom observation was analyzed using percentage. Percentage for all areas was calculated and graph was obtained. Figure 2 below shows the overall performance of preschool teachers.

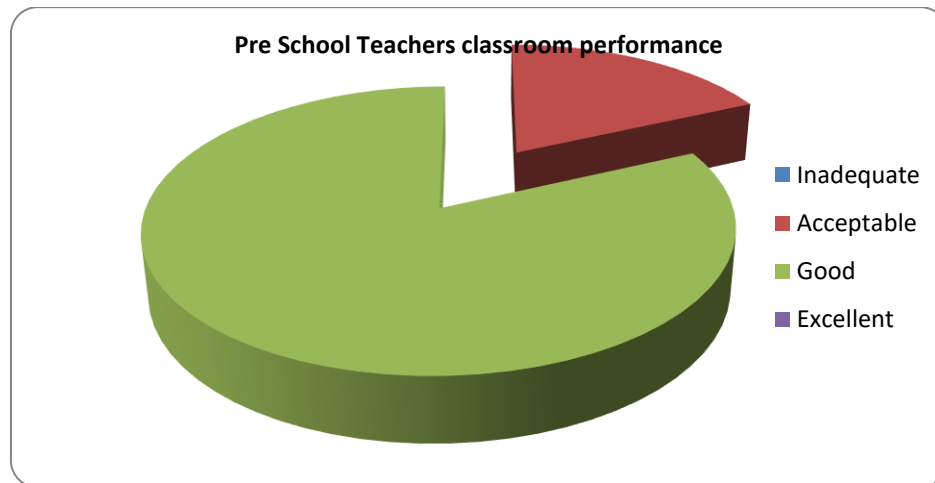


Figure 2: Classroom observation results of preschool teachers

Observation:

- Out of 31 preschool English medium teachers, 25 teachers have secured good grade and 6 are in acceptable range.
- This shows that preschool teacher’s performance is good as 80% teachers have achieved good grade. Still it can be made excellent as there are no teachers who secured excellent grade.

Area wise description of data: Figure 3 shows area wise performance of preschool teachers:

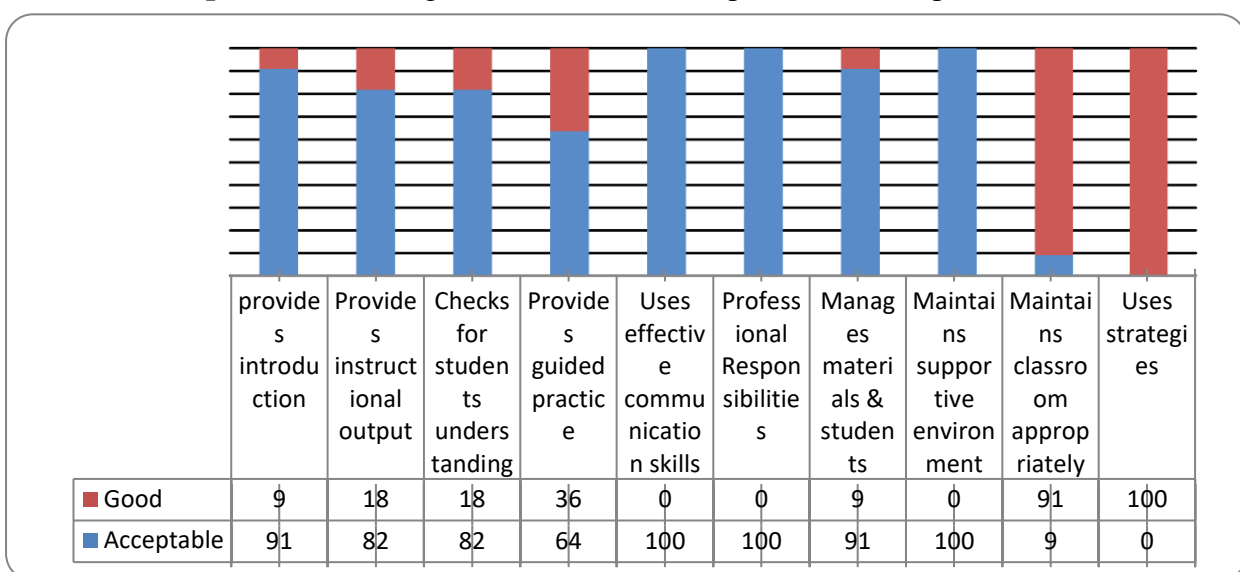


Figure 3: Area wise performance of preschool teachers

Observations:

- Preschool teachers are doing good as majority of the teachers are in the range that range and for few areas they are in the range of acceptable.
- Majority of teachers are good at providing instructions, fulfilling their professional duties, providing support to learners and use of effective communications skills.
- Immediate concerns are uses variety of new strategies and maintaining congenial classroom environment.

Interpretation:

As majority of the teachers have secured good grades we can conclude that quality of teaching learning is good. None of the teachers could get excellent grade which means there is lot of scope for improvement in areas specially awareness about new strategies and happenings in the field f early years education.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Figure 4 below shows the coding of the qualitative data obtained from the interview about challenges faced or problems faced by the preschool teachers:

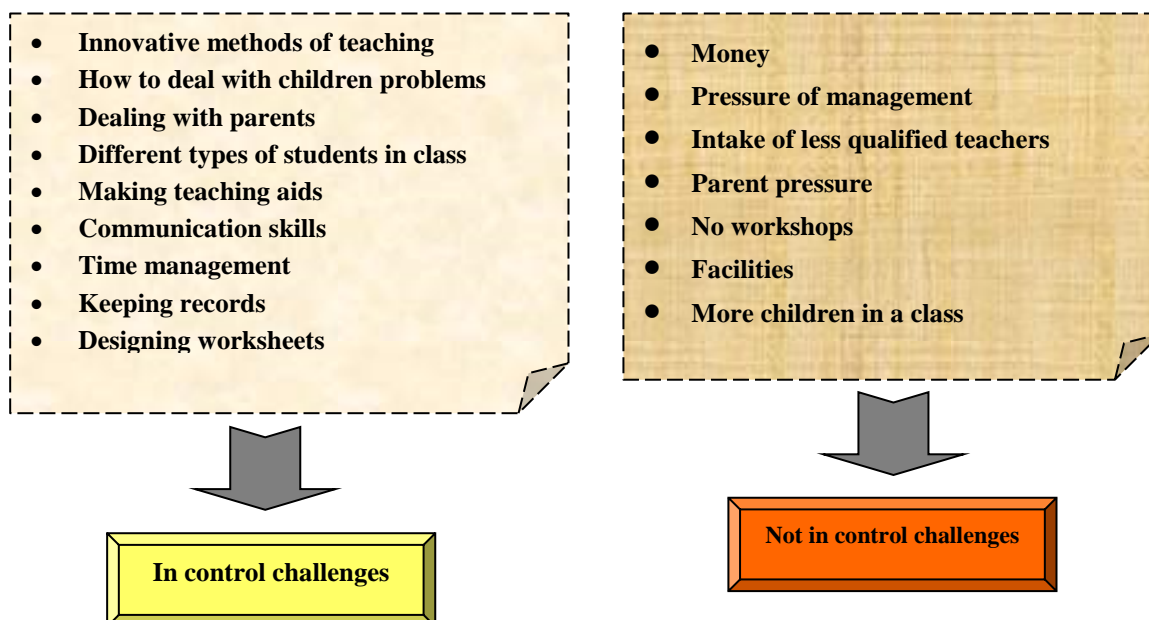


Figure 4: Responses of preschool teachers regarding the challenges faced by them in day today teaching learning

Discussion: The above Figure 4 shows the responses analyzed and categorized into two main categories: ‘In control challenges’ and ‘Not in control challenges’. Using Axial Coding the theme that arose from the responses was that ‘The faced more challenges that are in their control and few which cannot be controlled by them’. Their responses showed that are finding skills they are lacking as challenges like time management, using new strategies, developing teaching aids and so on which they can easily overcome with the help of few trainings. They are getting stressed due to some factors like salary, competition, management pressure etc which they can’t control but its effects can be reduced due to some stress management and interpersonal skills trainings. We can conclude that teachers want to and can do excellent with the help of little support by management and experts.

Areas wise preference of skill development by the preschool teachers: A list of areas was given to preschool teachers and they were asked to tick which they don't know and would like to learn about. Figure 5 below shows area wise preference by preschool teachers.

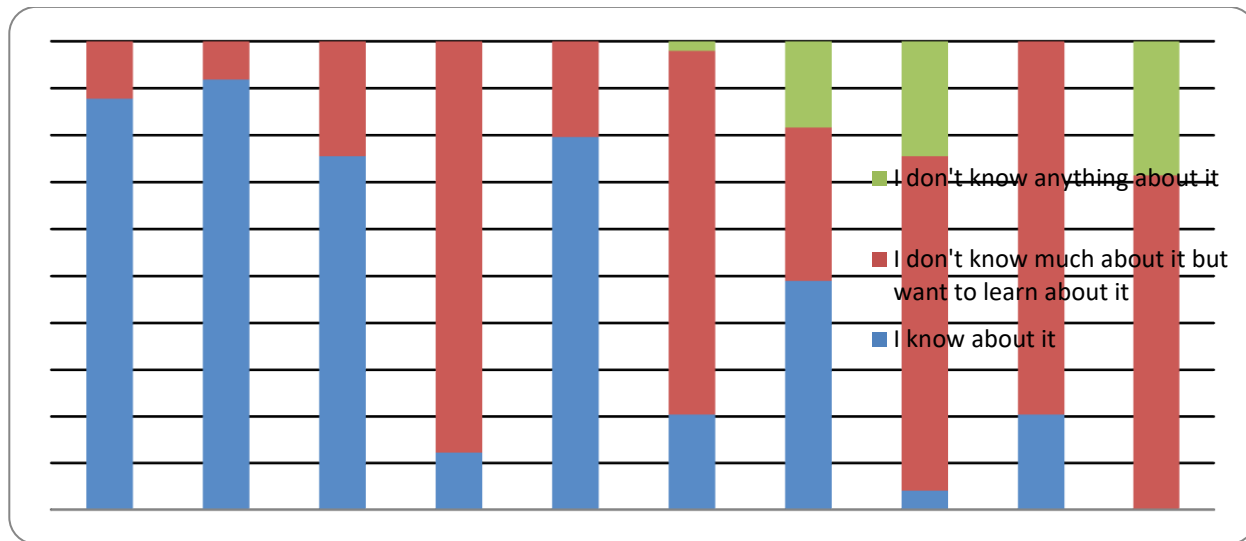


Figure 5: Area wise preference of skill development by preschool teachers

Discussion: From the above figure it is evident that preschool teachers want to learn more about intervention strategies, assessment strategies which is reflected from their interview responses too. (Fig.4). Teachers are good at lesson planning and classroom management but still want to learn about managing diverse classrooms (Fig.4 & 3). They have opted for learning more about multiple intelligences which stresses the need of dealing with diverse learners in the classroom.

Major Findings & Conclusion:

- ✓ Majority of the teachers have secured good grades we can conclude that quality of teaching learning is good.
- ✓ Preschool teachers face more challenges that are in their control and few which cannot be controlled by them.
- ✓ Teachers want to learn more about many areas like using intervention strategies, assessment strategies, classroom management and so on.

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