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Early Childhood Educational Activities Conducted In Preschools and Its Effects on Reading and Writing Ability of Children

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ABSTRACT

A stratified random sample of 120 children was selected from total 20 urban and rural preschools. Total 6 students from each preschool and two Anganwadi from each village were selected randomly in the age range 4-6 years for studying educational activities conducted in preschools and its effects on reading and writing ability of children. The urban preschool teachers had recognition of conducting reading and writing activities of preschoolers for their further development in various aspects while such awareness was not noted among rural preschool teachers and very few had responded for it. Few highly significant differences were noted for conducting activities as two words reading, rhyming words games and visual perception of basic concepts among urban and rural children. The highly significant results were noted for scribbling, collage activity, writing in sand tray, tracing shapes and alphabet, writing two word sentence.

Keywords : Anganwadi, Preschool, Reading & writing ability

INTRODUCTION

Children are natural learners. They have an innate sense of curiosity. Quality pre-school education is crucial for school readiness and strong early learning in primary school. Neuroscience research had showed that in the first 5-7 years after birth, there are critical periods during which certain neural connections are formed, which are critical for cognitive and language competencies. Numerous studies have shown that students who are exposed to reading before preschool are more likely to do well when they reach their period of formal education. The effects of reading and writing on child development include cognitive and emotional benefits, such as helping children develop language skills and literacy, build empathy and learn how to handle challenging feelings. The benefits of reading to children include helping them build language skills, learn about the world and develop empathy and emotional awareness. Senol (2021) carried out a study to examine the practices and views of pre-school teachers on readiness for reading and writing. Reading at early stage comprises of alphabet knowledge including naming and identifying the names and sounds associated with them, phonological awareness which includes being able to identify, comprehend or analyze the spoken language, writing letters, vocabulary, remembering and comprehend content of spoken language for a short period of time. Reading Skills Concepts (e.g., reading left to right, top to bottom, front back) print awareness which includes ability to match or discriminate visually presented pictures/symbols. Aboagye et al. (2016) reported that reading ability among learners has far reaching influence and an indispensable gateway to the acquisition of knowledge. Reading ability level of learners impressed hugely on their proficiency levels in language acquisition as well as knowledge. Barnett (2004) highlights that quality preschool education significantly boosts cognitive skills, academic performance, and behavior in children, while the ICDS program supports holistic development. By focusing on the 3Rs, preschool education facilitates comprehensive growth in various areas and lays the groundwork for essential literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills through experiential learning. Senechal and LeFevre (2002) conducted a five-year longitudinal study with 168 and upper-class preschool children in Ottawa, Canada, revealing that parental involvement in early literacy activities positively correlates with children's receptive language, emergent literacy skills, and reading achievement. Their findings suggest that active parental engagement in teaching reading and writing significantly supports the development of early literacy skills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this study, total 20 preschools were selected from urban (10) and rural (10) area from Parbhani district, Marathwada region, Maharashtra State. For studying educational activities conducted in rural preschools, the 5 villages were chosen at random based on their accessibility. A stratified random sample of 120 children was selected from total 20 preschools. Total 6 students, in the age range 4-6 years from each preschool and two Anganwadi from each village were selected randomly.

Besides interviewing the concerned staff of the selected preschools, naturalistic observation was done in preschools, to collect the first hand information as well as physical infrastructure, safety, health, hygiene & nutritional care taken in the preschool. Using a prepared questionnaire, preschool activities were observed with the help of naturalistic observation during preschool working hours, to know the various activities conducted in the preschool, the teaching aids used and methodology adopted by the teacher for teaching preschool children. A structured and open ended interview schedule cum checklist was prepared to elicit information from urban and rural preschools and children`s personal background, availability of educational play material in preschools for carrying out various activities, involvement of teacher in various educational activities etc. Thus data collected pertaining to the study was pooled, tabulated, statistically analyzed and discussed.

An unpaired t-test was used to compare the averages/means of two independent groups i.e urban and rural preschools / available facilities or various activities conducted in preschools to determine significant difference. The correlation of coefficient was computed for assessing the relationship between dependent and independent variables of present research study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 reveals the background information of children from urban and rural preschools. It was revealed that 58% & 72% selected children were in the age group of 4-5 years from urban and rural preschools respectively. While 42% & 28% of the children were in the age group 5-6 yrs respectively. It was found that 40% boys and 60% girls were hailed from urban and rural area respectively and among them 48% were boys and 52% were girl students. Caste of the selected children depicts a higher percentage of children were from open category (38-52%). In gist, it indicate that majority of the selected preschool children were in the age range 4-5 yrs (65%), girl students (54%) from open category (45%) having medium size of family (50%). In rural area, nearly fifty percent of families were having monthly income below Rs. 10,000 while about half of the urban families were having monthly income ranging between Rs. 20,000 – Rs. 60,000. Irrespective of demographic area, 37% selected children`s fathers were graduates while mothers (45%) were matriculates.

Table 1 Background information of the preschool children and their parents from urban and rural area

Background Variables	Frequency of preschool children		Frequency of children irrespective of demographic area (n=120)
	Urban (n=60)	Rural (n=60)	
Age (yrs)			
4-5 yrs	35 (58.33)	43 (71.66)	78 (65.00)
5-6 yrs	25 (41.66)	17 (28.33)	42 (35.00)
Gender			
Girls	36 (60.00)	31 (51.66)	65 (54.16)
Boys	24 (40.00)	29 (48.33)	55 (45.83)
Caste			
Open	23 (38.33)	31 (51.66)	54 (45.00)
OBC	14 (23.33)	18 (30.00)	32 (26.66)
NT/VJ NT	05 (8.33)	--	05 (41.66)
ST	07 (11.66)	03 (05.00)	10 (8.33)
SC	11 (18.33)	08 (13.33)	19 (15.83)
Type of Family			
Nuclear	41 (68.33)	22 (36.66)	63 (52.50)
Extended	19 (31.66)	38 (63.33)	57 (47.50)
Family Size			
Small (Below 4)	18 (30.00)	12 (20.00)	30 (25.00)
Medium (5-6)	28 (46.66)	32 (53.33)	60 (50.00)
Large (Above 6)	14 (23.33)	16 (26.66)	30 (25.00)
Family Monthly			

Income (Rs.)						
Below 10,000	13 (21.66)		36 (60.00)		49 (40.83)	
10,001 to 20,000	06 (10.00)		14 (23.33)		20 (16.66)	
20,001 to 60,000	29 (48.33)		10 (16.66)		39 (32.50)	
60,001 to 90,000	09 (15.00)		--		09 (7.50)	
Above 90,001	03 (5.00)		--		03 (2.50)	
Parental Education	**Fathers (n=60)**	**Mothers (n=60)**	**Fathers (n=60)**	**Mothers (n=60)**	**Fathers (n =120)**	**Mothers (n =120)**
Primary	--	01 (1.66)	02 (3.33)	03 (5.00)	02 (1.66)	04 (3.33)
SSC	09 (15.00)	26 (43.30)	17 (28.30)	28 (46.66)	26 (21.66)	54 (45.00)
HSC	17 (28.33)	13 (21.60)	22 (36.60)	19 (31.66)	39 (32.50)	32 (26.66)
Graduates	27 (45.00)	16 (26.60)	18 (30.00)	09 (15.00)	45 (37.50)	25 (20.83)
Post graduates	07 (11.66)	04 (6.66)	01 (1.66)	01 (1.66)	08 (6.66)	05 (04.16)
Occupation of Parents						
Private job	23 (38.33)	05 (8.33)	10 (16.66)	04 (6.66)	33 (27.5)	09 (7.5)
Government job	13 (21.66)	07 (11.66)	11 (18.33)	03 (5.00)	24 (20.00)	10 (8.33)
Business	16 (26.66)	8 (13.33)	12 (20.00)	06 (10.00)	28 (23.33)	14 (11.66)
Agriculture	05 (8.33)	03 (05.00)	16 (26.66)	13 (21.66)	21 (17.5)	16 (13.33)
Labor	03 (05.00)	01 (1.66)	15 (25.00)	11 (18.33)	14 (11.66)	16 (13.33)
Homemaker	--	13 (21.66)	--	36 (60.00)	--	49 (40.83)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages Opinions of preschool teachers on the importance of reading and writing activities conducted in selected urban and rural preschools are detailed in table 2 the preschool teachers from urban areas expressed that they gave importance to reading and writing activities for developing eye hand coordination, for preparing children for their primary education, to recognize their own names, small words and even for development of their various concepts (80% each).

Table 2 : Opinions of preschool teachers on the importance of reading and writing activities conducted in selected urban and rural preschools

Opinions of preschool teachers	**Frequency & mean scores of activities conducted in preschools (n=20)**				
	Urban (10)		**Rural (10)**		
	Frequency (a)	**Mean ± SD (b)**	**Frequency (c)**	**Mean ± SD (d**	**t values b Vs d**
Prepare for primary education	08 (80.00)	1.8 ± 0.42	01 (10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	4.2^{**}
Recognize own name	08 (80.00)	1.8 ± 0.42	06 (60.00)	1.6 ±0.51	0.95^{NS}
Concept development	08 (80.00)	1.8 ± 0.42	--	--	13.5^{**}
Recognize alphabet & numbers	07 (70.00)	1.7 ± 0.48	01 (10.00)	1.1± 0.31	3.32^{**}
Development of fine motor skills	06 (60.00)	1.6 ± 0.51	02 (20.00)	1.2 ± 0.42	1.91^{NS}
Recognize the voice modulation & pronunciation	05 (50.00)	1.5± 0.52	01 (10.00)	1.1± 0.31	2.09^{*}
Visual perception	05(50.00)	1.5 ± 0.52	01(10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	2.09^{*}
Eye hand coordination	08 (80.00)	1.8 ±0.42	--	--	13.5^{**}
Cognitive development	08 (80.00)	1.8 ± 0.42	01 (10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	4.24^{**}

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages *P <0.05 level **P <0.01 level NS- No Significant

They also opined that these activities assist children to recognize alphabet and numbers (70%), develop fine motor skills (60%) and even enhance their visual perception, voice modulation and pronunciation (50%). On the contrary the preschools teachers from rural area had opinion that with reading and writing skills development, preschool children recognize own name and can read the bold letters (60%) and few of them recognized reading and writing skills importance for development of fine motor skills (10-20%).

Table 3 represent the activities carried out for readiness of preschoolers for reading skills development in selected urban and rural preschools. The various activities conducted in urban preschools for enhancing children`s reading skills included mostly alphabet, words & numbers recognition and easy access to books to children in classroom for reading purpose (60% each). It was followed by activities like picture reading, two word reading (50% each). While other reading activities like rhyming words games, sequencing picture story, small sentence construction (40% each), auditory perception activities, visual perception activities for various basic concepts, developing vocabulary through conversation (30% each) and activity as revising story were reported to be conducted rarely (only 20%).

Table 3 : Activities carried out for readiness of reading skills development of preschoolers in selected urban and rural preschools

Activities for readiness of Reading skills	Frequency & mean scores of activities conducted in preschools (n=20)				
	Urban (10)		Rural (10)		t values b Vs d
	Frequency (a)	Mean ± SD (b)	Frequency (c)	Mean ± SD (d)	
Reading activities					
Alphabet, words, numbers recognition	06 (60.00)	1.6 ± 0.51	03 (30.00)	1.3 ± 0.48	1.35^{NS}
Access to books	06 (60.00)	1.6 ± 0.51	03 (30.00)	1.3 ± 0.48	1.35^{NS}
Picture reading	05(50.00)	1.5 ± 0.52	01 (10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	2.09^{*}
Auditory perception	03 (30.00)	1.3 ± 0.48	02 (20.00)	1.2 ± 0.42	1.9^{NS}
Rhyming words games	04 (40.00)	1.4 ± 0.51	--	--	8.6^{**}
Visual perception of basic concepts	03 (30.00)	1.3 ± 0.48	--	--	8.5^{**}
Developing vocabulary through conversation	03 (30.00)	1.3 ± 0.48	01 (10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	1.10^{NS}
Sequencing picture story	04 (40.00)	1.4 ± 0.51	01 (10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	1.59^{NS}
Revising a story	02 (20.00)	1.2 ± 0.42	02 (20.00)	1.2 ± 0.42	--
Reading aloud	04 (40.00)	1.4 ± 0.51	02 (20.00)	1.2 ± 0.42	-0.43^{NS}
Two word reading	05 (50.00)	1.5 ± 0.52	--	--	9.12^{**}
Small sentence construction	04 (40.00)	1.4 ± 0.51	01 (10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	1.50^{NS}

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages $^{*}P < 0.05$ level $^{**}P < 0.01$ level NS- Non -Significant

Some of the anganwadi (rural preschool) teachers were expressing displeasure about conducting various ECCE activities that they find it very difficult to conduct as many of the times they have to submit some time bound data related to ICDS activities or rather any other activity assigned duties they do, which are time demanding and therefore such assignments affect daily activities of anganwadi negatively. Few highly significant differences were noted for conducting activities as two words reading, rhyming words games and visual perception of basic concepts among urban and rural children.

Table 4 & fig 1 represent the activities carried out for readiness of preschoolers for writing skills development in selected urban and rural preschools. With respect to writing activities conducted in selected preschools, it was noted that mostly joining the dots to complete the picture (80%), practicing forms of letters, tracing shapes and alphabets (70% each). In some of the rural preschools, joining the dots (60%) and practicing form of letters (40%). Again it can be said that urban preschools were focusing more on writing activities compared to rural preschools.

Table 4 : Activities carried out for readiness of writing skills development of preschoolers in selected urban and rural preschools

Activities for readiness of writing skills	Frequency & mean scores of activities conducted in preschools (n=20)				
	Urban (10)		Rural (10)		t values b Vs d
	Frequency (a)	Mean ± SD (b)	Frequency (c)	Mean ± SD (d)	
Writing activity					
Scribbling	02 (20.00)	1.2 ± 0.42	--	--	9.03**
Collage activity	03 (30.00)	1.3 ± 0.48	--	--	8.56**
Writing in sand tray	02 (20.00)	1.2 ± 0.42	--	--	9.03**
Drawing	05(50.00)	1.5 ± 0.52	01 (10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	2.09*
practicing forms of letters	07 (70.00)	1.7 ± 0.48	04 (40.00)	1.4 ± 0.51	1.35NS
Join the dots	08(80.00)	1.8 ± 0.42	06 (60.00)	1.6 ± 0.51	0.96NS
Tracing shapes, alphabet	07 (70.00)	1.7 ± 0.48	--	--	11.2**
Joining word & picture	06 (60.00)	1.6 ± 0.51	01 (10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	0.83NS
Writing simple words	04 (40.00)	1.4 ± 0.51	01 (10.00)	1.1 ± 0.31	1.59NS
Writing two word sentence	05 (50.00)	1.5 ± 0.52	--	--	9.12**

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages *P <0.05 level **P <0.01 level NS- Non –Significant

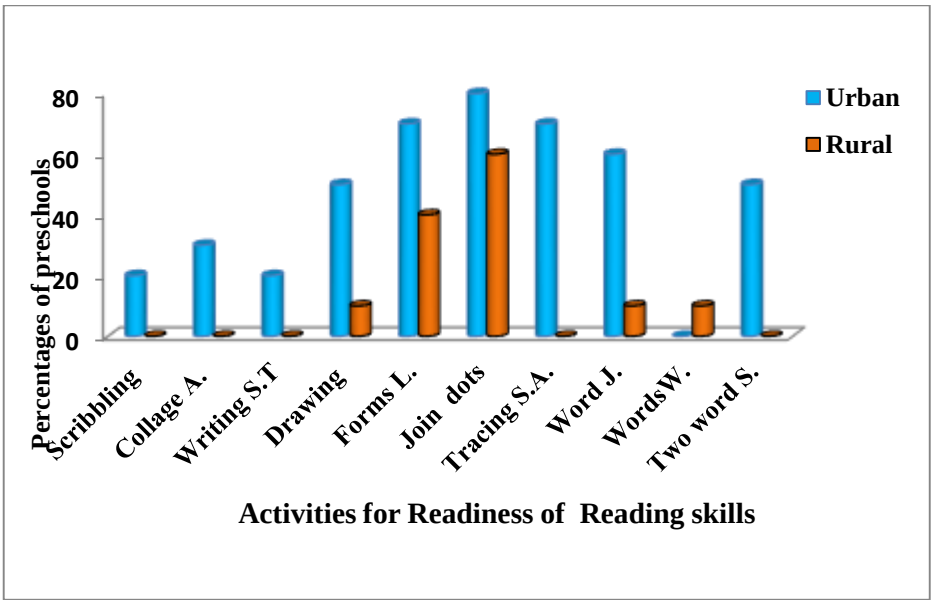

Fig. 1 : Activities carried out for Readiness of Writing skills in selected urban and rural preschools

Table 5 & fig 2 pertains to overall reading & writing test scores of urban and rural preschool children. It is evident that a large majority of the urban children (82%) and rural children (62%) gained average scores of reading and writing skills without any significant difference. While highly significant difference was seen in the percentages of below average score of urban and rural children with regard to their reading and writing test scores of selected preschool children with regard to their reading & writing test scores of selected preschool children.

Table 5 : Overall Reading and Writing Test percentile scores of urban & rural preschool children

Reading & writing test scores	Frequency of preschool children (n-120)		Z values
	Urban (60)	Rural (60)	
Average (41-60)	49 (81.66)	37(61.66)	1.52^{NS}
Below average (26-40)	11 (18.33)	23(38.33)	3.70^{**}
Poor (12-25)	--	--	--

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages *P <0.05 level **P <0.01 level NS- Non –Significant

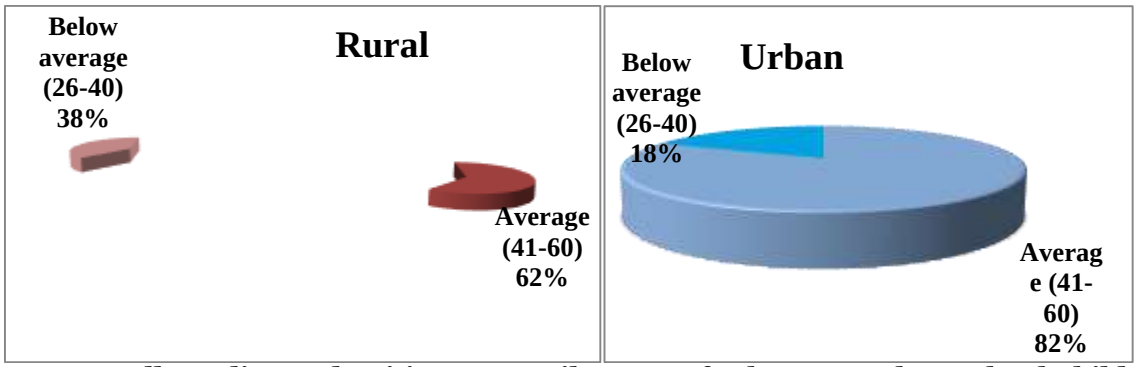

Fig. 2 : Overall Reading and writing percentile score of urban & rural preschool Children

It shows that there is lot of scope for improving the reading and writing abilities of urban (18%) and rural (38%) children. However it shows significant number of rural children were noted to be categorized in below average category of reading and writing test.

Conclusion

The urban preschool teachers had recognition of conducting reading and writing activities of preschoolers for their further development in various aspects while such awareness was not noted among rural preschool teachers and very few had responded for it. Comparatively urban preschool teachers were found to be orienting preschoolers on reading and writing readiness through various activities so as to prepare them for further primary education. The highly significant results were noted for scribbling, collage activity, writing in sand tray, tracing shapes and alphabet, writing two word sentences these activities were found to be conducted in urban preschools only. Irrespective of demographic area need to be provided with more exposure to pre reading and pre writing activities with use of appropriate teaching aids, audio visual aids and adult guidance for vocabulary development, audio visual perception and copying test so that the students develop proficient reading & writing abilities.

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