

Research Article

School Readiness: Linguistically Diverse Learners' perspective- A Case study

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Abstract

Early childhood education is crucial for children for getting well adjusted in the school. The research in brain development emphasizes that early learning especially from birth to five, directly influences a child's ability to learn and succeed in school. School Readiness is the most researched area in the field of early childhood education. Research indicates that preschoolers who attend high quality programs enter the school with skills necessary for school success, show greater understanding of verbal and numerical concepts and are more socially competent. But in the case of linguistically diverse learners, all these theory fails and sometimes the preschool education is making their life more problematic. The teachers are not well trained to make the children comfortable in their classroom. The language barrier makes the teachers helpless to make their classroom conducive for developing the skills necessary for success in school. The child is also feeling embarrassed and feel isolated in the classroom and the activities meant for developing and nourishing the skills of children make a contradictory result. In this context, a case study was conducted in the select preschools to find out the school readiness of linguistically diverse learners. Being a qualitative study, the data were collected through informal discussion and semi structured interview. In this paper, author discusses the problems faced by teachers and linguistically diverse students in the classroom and also its effect on the school readiness of these children.

Key words: School Readiness, Linguistic Diversity, Early Childhood Education

Introduction

Early childhood is considered to be a crucial period in the life span of an individual characterized by significant growth and development with the brain development at its peak . During this stage, children are highly influenced by the environment and the people surround by them. So it is our responsibility to provide a conducive environment for their optimum development. Thus the Government of India made efforts and introduced many policies and schemes in this field. ECCE, early child hood care education is one among them. ECCE caters to all children under 6 years of age and commits to universal access to quality early childhood education. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) is the nodal department for ECCE. MWCD is responsible for the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, which is a centrally sponsored and state administered ECCE programme, covering

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School Readiness: Linguistically Diverse Learners' perspective- A Case study

around 38 million children through a network of almost 1.4 million anganwadi centers (UNICEF India). ICDS includes delivery of an integrated package of services such as supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up, preschool education, referral services and nutrition & health education. ECCE is one of the components and aims at psycho-social development of children and developing school readiness (UNICEF India).

School Readiness - Concept

School readiness means the readiness of children to engage in learning experiences of school and to get benefit from these experiences to enhance the knowledge, skills which lead the success of child.

The school readiness have three inter connected, complex components. They are

- a. **Ready children** focusing on children's learning and development.
- b. **Ready schools** focusing on the school environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school and advance and promote the learning of all children.
- c. **Ready families** focusing on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning and development and transition to school.

Interrelation between School Readiness and Early Child hood Education

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is more than preparation for primary school. It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. ECCE has the possibility to nurture caring, capable and responsible future citizens.

In this way ECCE is one of the best investments a country can make to promote human resource development, gender equality and social cohesion, and to reduce the costs for later remedial programmes. Research has proved that early child hood education is crucial for children for getting well adjusted in the school. The research in brain development emphasizes that early learning especially from birth to five, directly influences a child's ability to learn and succeed in school (California Preschool Learning Foundations 2008) . If a child gets good quality early child hood education he/she should be well equipped with necessary skills to participate in the activities in school and get benefit from the experiences of school.

Research in the area of early child hood education reports that those who attend early child hood education have following benefits.

1. They have skills necessary for school success
2. They comprehend concepts easily
3. They are more social and adjusting with new environment
4. They show more progress in all activities in school.

Review of literature

Studies on School readiness and factors influencing School readiness

There is plenty of evidence that the early child hood education helps the students to excel in coming grades (Classens et al., 2009, Bodovski and Farkas 2007, Duncan et al., 2007, La Paro and Pianta 2000).

Rogoff (2003) reported that school readiness understands the child, family and school as embedded within social, cultural and historic influences (Rogoff 2003). Moreover, success in school is determined by a range of basic behaviours and abilities, including literacy, numeracy, ability to follow directions, working well with other children and engaging in learning activities (Rouse, Brooks-Gunn and McLanahan 2005). So in the case of linguistically diverse learners, some of these components are lacking, like the ability to follow instructions, working well with other children and engaging in learning activities. Kagan et al., (1993) emphasized the importance of language development in children because it directly related to school readiness and later success in school. Kagan (2003) also observed that school readiness are holistic and include five domains linked with later school performance and behaviour: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge, including mathematics (Kagan, Moore and Bredekamp 1993). Raver (2004) observed that the school readiness is directly related to social and emotional domain. Aspects of the social and emotional domain include sustained attention, emotional regulation, following directions, social relationships and social cognition (McCabe et al. 2004; Raver 2004). In the case of linguistically diverse learners they lack the components like following instructions, social relationships and social cognition. Researchers identified the important factors influence school readiness. Attitudes towards learning, such as task persistence, attention, creativity, initiative, curiosity and problem solving, are also known to be important for school readiness. Based on these concepts, school readiness is a holistic way of looking at children's preparedness for school. Not limited to one area of development or functioning, readiness embraces the interrelationships between skills and behaviours across domains of development and learning (Denton 2000; Schoen and Nagle 2004).

All the studies focus on the different factors essential in the school readiness and thus the success in the school. But the linguistically diverse learners lack one or more components and lag behind their peers in the school.-

Need of the study

India is a multi cultural and multilingual country demonstrating a great example for the whole world. India is diverse in many respects. There is religious diversity, linguistic diversity, cultural diversity etc. The diversity of country is a boon in one hand as it created an identity among the world besides providing rich cultural heritage. But on the other hand in the realm of education, the diversity of India engenders great challenges especially in the case of diverse language learners. The problem aggravates in the case of early child hood education as the teachers have to interact with the students who are in the 3-5 years old. Research in early child hood education proved that those who attend quality early child hood education are well adjusted, easily understand the concepts and more successful in their school life. But, a class room consisting of diverse language learners is really a challenge for the teachers and teaching them is a particular challenge to them. Moreover, in the case of linguistically diverse learners, the researcher is curious to know how the pre school education is going to affect them. Being the

School Readiness: Linguistically Diverse Learners' perspective- A Case study

crucial period of growth and development the pre school activities is actually nourishes the child with skills necessary for success in school life.

In this context, a case study was conducted in the select preschools to find out the school readiness of linguistically diverse learners. The investigator is interested to know the effect of pre school education on linguistically diverse learners and their school readiness.

Title of the study

The study is entitled as “ School Readiness : Linguistically Diverse Learners' Perspective-A case study

Definition of the Key terms

School Readiness

School readiness is a measure of how prepared a child is to succeed in school, cognitively, socially and emotionally. The three dimensions of school readiness are: (1) Ready children, focusing on children's learning and development. (2) Ready schools, focusing on the school environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school and advance and promote the learning of all children. (3) Ready families, focusing on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning and development and transition to school.

For the study school readiness is defined as the successful adjustment and participation in all activities and programmes in school

Linguistically diverse learners

Linguistically diverse learners are those students who came from different cultural and linguistic back grounds.

For the present study, the students whose language differ from the majority of the students in the class is referred as linguistically diverse learners.

Objectives

1. To study the problems faced by students in linguistically diverse classroom
2. To study the problems and challenges faced by the teachers in linguistically diverse classroom

Methodology

Method adopted for the study

Case study

Tool

Semi structured interview

Observation

Sample

The linguistically diverse students-The students whose language differ from the majority of the students in the class of select pre schools was taken as sample for the study. The investigator surveyed the preschools in Kohefiza , Bhopal and selected five preschools where linguistically diverse learners were present.

Results of the study

Investigator observed the process and functioning of class and observed in detail their working. The investigator identified 5 linguistically diverse students.

These students' language were different from the majority of students in the class. Investigator interviewed the teachers and supporting staff of the pre school. Investigator had informal discussion with the students and slowly they revealed the problems they are facing in the class room.

Problems and Challenges of teachers

The teachers faced a lot of problem in dealing with the linguistically diverse learners. The major problem they faced is communicating the basic instructions like Run, sit , stand , write etc to the child. The major problem they faced was , the child cannot understand what the teacher is saying and teacher cannot understand what child saying or what he/she needs.

The teachers communicated the basic instructions through actions and sometimes it made the child more harassed in front of the peers. The teacher is also in a dilemma to teach the basic things to the students.

Problems faced by students

The major problem faced by students is that they can't understand what the teacher is saying. This made the students embarrassed and they lost interest in school and it lead to lose interest in learning. The other students in the class made fun of them for not understanding the basic instructions. These students slowly feel lonely and lost interest in learning and also in the school. The teachers then over emphasized these students to learn a new language in order to survive in the school. This also made the students under stress and they became silent . The interview with the parent of linguistically diverse learners also revealed that she also faced problems in school. She said she was the target in parent teacher meeting and all other parents will complaint about the particular child. "aap falan ki mummy ho, sab log batate hai ki unko kuch samach nahi aathe hai" (" oh.You are mother of that Kid,, everybody saying that he doesn't understand anything"). She said that these words hurt her very much and she was also in a dilemma that how her kid will survive in the class. She said she also pressurized her son to learn the new language. This made a disparate result and she said that her son became silent. She said that before admitting the pre school, her son was fluent in his mother tongue and sang many songs and rhymes fluently in mother tongue. But he refused to speak in mother tongue after admitting in the pre school and avoided singing songs and rhymes . He became silent and dull. He was reluctant to go to school also. So she decided that not to pressurize her son more to learn. She also met the class teacher personally and said the behavior change of the son and the stress they are undergoing. After this incident teacher gave special consideration and encouraged his small efforts of learning a new language. .

Investigator's observations

- The pre-school prepares the child for school. But in the case of linguistically diverse learners , the pre school and its activities had a contrary effect.
- Research indicates that preschoolers who attend high quality programs enter the school with skills necessary for school success, show greater understanding of verbal and numerical concepts and are more socially competent. But in the case of linguistically diverse learners, all these theory fails and sometimes the preschool education is making their life more problematic. The teachers are not well trained to make the children comfortable in their classroom. The language barrier makes the teachers helpless to make their classroom conducive for developing the skills necessary for success in school. The child is also feeling embarrassed and feel isolated in the classroom and the activities meant for developing and nourishing the skills of children make a contrary result.
- The study revealed that the pre school education programmes adversely affected the linguistically diverse learners.
- Investigator observed that the abilities and the smartness of the child was moved out by getting admission in the pre school and the parents have to struggle hard for getting him back to normal life.
- Those pre school activities meant for nourishing the abilities of learners , gave a negative upshot to linguistically diverse learners , as these activities helped to adjust in the class room but not developed or nourished the abilities and potential of linguistically diverse learners.
- So measures should be taken to address the needs of linguistically diverse learners and proper training should be given to teachers while dealing with linguistically diverse learners.
- The number of linguistically diverse learners may be very meager but proper training should be given to teachers for giving adequate help to children in order to succeed and adjust in the school.
- From the study it is revealed that the programmes in the pre school meant for developing the personality and inner potential of the child offered a contrary outcome for the linguistically diverse learners. Hence, the pre school programmes must be analysed by the competent authority and their functioning should be properly measured in order to get good result.

The observation from the study directly leads to the enrichment of the school activities and environment where special attention should be given in order to foster and support smooth transition for children in to schools and promote learning of all children. Then only the aim of early child hood education is fulfilled.

Suggestions

- Measures should be taken to address the needs of linguistically diverse learners.
- Proper training should be given to teachers while dealing with linguistically diverse learners.

- The number of linguistically diverse learners may be very meager but addressing their need is utmost important as every child is unique and important .
- Pre school programmes must be analysed and their functioning should be properly measured in order to get good result.
- Discussion with the parents of linguistically diverse students will tremendously help to deal with these students. The teachers can adopt a strategy with discussion of their parents. They can write the basic instructions, or commands (for example, Sit, Stand, Write, Run, in the mother tongue of students and practice the correct pronunciation with the help of parents of linguistically diverse students . They can give instructions in three languages., English, Hindi and in mother tongue of child. This will help these children to understand basic instructions and it will motivate and develop interest in school activities.

Conclusion

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is very important and essential to fulfill the potentialities of child. It is more than preparation for primary school. It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. For these aims to be fulfilled, the pre schools have to perform better in developing the necessary skills in children. The teachers have to be trained in dealing with linguistic diversity. Then only ECCE become the best investments of a country and to promote human resource development, gender equality, social cohesion, and to reduce the costs for later remedial programmes.

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School Readiness: Linguistically Diverse Learners' perspective- A Case study

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