

**COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE SERVICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: THE
CASE OF PRESCHOOLS IN ROHINI, DELHI, INDIA**

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Abstract

Early childhood is the period from conception to age 8, a period that presents a developmental continuum, according to the theoretical framework of developmental psychology and learning theories. The term 'Care' has been added in recognition of the fact that young children need care and nurturing. In addition to their health and nutritional needs, their psychosocial and emotional needs also have to be met adequately for their holistic development. Research has also indicated that if these early years are not supported by, or embedded in, a stimulating and enriching physical and psychosocial environment, the chances of the child's brain developing to its full potential are considerably, and often irreversibly, reduced. Implies, this study explores counselling and guidance services in preschools in Rohini, Delhi, India. The in-depth semi structured interview schedules with teachers and overview of related regulations in Indian ECCE system were implied in data collection and interpretation. This study was conducted at four public preschools in Rohini, Delhi, India. In this study, the public preschool refers to the institutions in which young children at the age of 3–6 years old receive education. The interview schedule used in this study was developed by the researcher. It includes 15 open-ended questions regarding counselling services at the preschool level. Qualitative analysis procedure was used to analyze the data. As indicated in this small scale study, the teachers at the Indian preschools do not feel adequate to make accurate referrals to outside agencies, nor do they think that they have adequate professional information about child psychology. Besides, this study clarified the need for formalized training for counselling young children and their parents in the field of early childhood education. Teachers also need support and in-service training about child and parents related issues.

Key words: *counseling, guidance, early childhood education, preschool*

“Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. . .” Martin Luther King, Jr.

Early childhood is taken as the child's starting eight years period i.e. from birth to 8 years. This time period is really crucial for brain growth and other remarkable developments. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is not just preparing and sending a child for formal schooling. It stresses on the overall development of child consisting of his social, cognitive, motor, emotional and physical

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development etc. In pre schools of our nation, the main focus should be on the better and overall development of children throughout, which can only be possible by providing proper guidance and counseling of teachers of pre schools and parents as well as other stake holders of ECCE on the part of government. Moreover it should be on compulsory basis so that everyone will have the knowledge and understanding of the same and hence can contribute up to the maximum. These eight years can be spent by children in natural nurture way but if parents and other stake holders especially, teachers try to contribute according to the need and psychology of each and every child then the childhood of each and every child would be completely perfect or near to perfect. It doesn't mean to provide them everything before time or fulfill their all demands but to make them understand their own role and importance in the society. The starting age is very crucial as the child imitates who so ever is liked by him and hence social learning plays a major role, the teachers and parents should have proper knowledge of how to change the learning or to make him realize the effects of particular type of learning and then help him to modify it.

Review of literature:

Siraj Blatchford, 2010 describe that over the past decades, research on parent/ teacher collaboration has shown that when communities, parents and teachers work together as partners with shared, meaningful, educational aims in mind, the potential for improving children's learning outcomes is enhanced. The Effective Provision of Preschool Education study found that the quality of the home learning environment strongly promoted children's cognitive and social development

Oniye and Durosaro (2009) explain that guidance and counseling is a pre-requisite for quality teaching of preschool children. Guidance and counseling is a social function aimed at guiding desirable growth and behavior, allowing children to develop peaceful, fruitful and productive behavior that would not be harmful to them or society. Guidance and counseling enhances the quality of preschool children education programs as children develop productive behaviors.

Asonibare, 2004 describes that good and bad habits are learnt and unlearned hence the care givers' main aim is to facilitate appropriate behavior in preschool children because this may influence other

children's behavior. Preschool teachers try to ensure that children are guided and counseled to display appropriate behavior though they may find the task difficult.

Kağıtçıbaşı et al., 2009, describe that early childhood education provides positive outcomes not only for the child but for the family and the society. Hence, quantitative and qualitative aspects of early childhood education have become development indicators for countries (UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), 2010).

A study by Okeke and Ani, 2006, Okeke & Ani, 2006, Ogunsanmi, 2011 noted that in Nigeria, most preschools and primary schools have no guidance and counseling units. This jeopardizes the quality of preschool education and care that could be of help to these children giving them the right physical, psychological and social setting for growth and development.

A study by Bierman and Erath (2006) highlighted that the teacher-led curriculum targeting the behavior of preschool learners is dependent on the teacher-child relationship. High levels of teacher sensitivity and support are associated with reductions in aggressive behavior by children. Conflict resolution management styles by teachers provide models for preschool children that influence their approach towards their peers by promoting self-regulation of attention-seeking behavior (Asonibare, 2004). However, a negative approach to guidance and counselling compromises the quality of preschool programmes.

Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005, describes the positive effects of early intervention programs on later lives of young children have become clear as documented by international longitudinal studies.

A European longitudinal study by Barnett (2004) on behavior guidance policies in which teachers supported children in rationalizing and talking through their conflicts concluded that there was often no follow-up on children's misbehavior and, on many occasions, children were distracted or admonished in negative ways. Follow-up on children's behavior enhances the quality of preschool programs.

EFA, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, describe that government has taken measures to develop early childhood education throughout the country.

Although preschool education is not adequate both in quantitative and qualitative aspects, it progresses throughout the country. Efforts to integrate various facets of ECCE into services provided by the Anganwadi Centers established under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme and to expand institutionalized ECCE services, including pre-school sections attached to schools, have resulted in substantial increase in the number of children receiving pre-school education. The number of children of age 3 to 5+ years who received pre-school education under the ICDS Scheme increased from 16.7 million in 2001-02 to 35.3 million in 2012-13. Available data indicates that the total enrolment in pre-primary education programs has increased from 13.9 million in 1999 to 41.3 million in 2010.

The above discussion indicated that in the absence of the school psychologist, if teachers carry out the job of the psychologists it will certainly arises some problems for teachers, children, and families. Therefore, this study focused on the status of counseling and guidance services and related problems experienced at the preschools by the teacher.

Need of the study:

The main aim of a pre-school education program is “supporting psychomotor, socio-emotional, language and cognitive development, acquisition of self-help skills, and readiness for primary school education”. The regulation also stated the job description of the psychologist at the preschools in detail.

Accordingly, a child psychologist employed in a preschool should:

- (1) Take preventive measures for the optimal psychological development of children;
- (2) Perform testing and measurement;
- (3) inform the school staff about child mental health issues;
- (4) Plan and implement family training;
- (5) conduct special studies for children with problems as identified by tests, parents, and teachers;

(6) make accurate diagnosis and treatment;

This case study intended to look whether preschool children got guidance and counseling services from their teachers or by professional child psychologists since it is a quality indicator in preschool programs. The purpose of this case study was to examine the status of counseling and guidance services in preschools in Rohini, Delhi, India.

Methodology

The case study approach was applied throughout this study. In a case study, the issue is explored in a bounded system through comprehensive, in-depth data collection (Creswell, 2007). Implies, this study explores status of counseling and guidance services in preschools in Rohini, Delhi, India. The in-depth semi structured interview schedules with teachers and overview of related regulations in Indian ECCE system were implied in data collection and interpretation.

Sample:

The sample was purposively sampled and was drawn from 5 preschool schools in Rohini, Delhi urban area consisting 10 teachers and 10 parents (5 males and 5 females). In this study, the public preschool refers to the institutions in which young children at the age of 3–5 years old receive education. Participants from each preschool were purposefully chosen for the interview as suggested by school. Participants were informed about the objectives, need and scope of the study and their consents to be involved in the study were obtained. All of the preschool teachers in this study had a diploma in early childhood education.

Tool:

Interview schedule

The interview schedule used in this study was developed by the researcher. It includes 15 open-ended questions regarding counseling services at the preschool level and it was determined that questions and

contents were relevant to the purpose of this study. The questions in the interview comprised of the counseling provided in the schools, parent-teacher association, child-teacher association and future planning in the field.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher conducted the in depth interviews after discussing the ethical issues. The researchers visited the purposively sampled schools and interviewed the participants at their convenient times. Permission to carry out the interviews was sought from the school head.

Data Analysis

Data was thematically analyzed. The whole interview data were typed and read for several times. Then, the data were aggregated into several categories and collapsed into major themes.

Findings

Status of Counseling Services in Schools

All of the participants in the study revealed that there is no professional or school psychologist to provide the counseling and guidance services in their schools. The teachers were providing the guidance whatever they feel suitable or according to their own understanding for children and families themselves as and when required as per their own understanding. Teachers described many problems associated with providing counseling and guidance services which are listed in detail in the following paragraphs.

Adequacy of the Case referrals

Making appropriate and adequate referrals to specialists' child psychologists constitutes an important step in diagnosis and treatment process of early childhood disorders and problems (Schroeder & Gordon, 2002).

The following were the highlighted issues in this concern:

- Teachers indicated that they made referrals for children to outside counseling agencies and professionals, such as psychologists, psychiatrists.
- Teachers indicated confusions about the appropriateness and adequateness of their referrals.

All the sampled teachers indicated that, there are many situations in which:

- We do not know how to response to the parents' queries and child problem behavior like cases of home sickness, aggression, ADHD, differently abled and dyslexia's and phobia's related problems.
- We do not know if the referral to outside counseling agencies and professionals is necessary or not, maybe there is something that we can do to support the child.
- We do not know the kind of referrals we make to counseling agencies and professionals if we cannot manage the existing problem of the child.
- We are not sure about the accurateness of our referrals.
- We just advise parents to approach to some professional; however we are not always confident in which problem which professional will help them;
- We make referrals just because we cannot manage the child's behavior or situation.
- All the sampled teachers indicated that they relied on their personal experiences in making referrals to outside counseling agencies and professionals.
- We generally refer the parents to the professionals that we personally know and trust.

Coordination between schools, teachers, guidance and counseling professionals and parents

Teachers also indicated many issues about the coordination between schools, guidance and counseling professionals and parents. All sampled teachers indicated that

- Guidance and counseling professionals do not provide guidance to the teachers in the process of diagnosis and treatment of the child.
- They do not inform us or do not offer educational programs to support the child in the school.
- Generally parents are in contact with the guidance and counseling professionals and unable to transact the follow-up remedial process suggested by the counseling professionals at school.
- Generally parents do not understand the sayings of the professionals as per the interaction occurred between teachers and parents about the consequences of the referrals made.

- There are impairments about the associations and coordination between teachers, guidance and counseling professionals and parents and needs to be diagnosed inclusively and exclusively.

Trustworthiness between Parents and teachers

- Sampled Teachers described many problems associated with building trustworthiness in understanding the case problems and need for providing counseling services for their child and parents to themselves. They indicated that this was a thing of expertise and professionals.
- Sampled teachers described that there were communication problems between parents and teachers.
- Sampled teachers also indicated that being a preschool teacher and providing information to parents about child psychology was taken inappropriate by the parents.
- Sampled Teachers described that providing child related counseling and guidance services for parents is a burden for me as it is a very specialized job of professionals.
- Sampled Teachers told that our diploma in early childhood education and our knowledge is limited within this type of professional expertise.
- Sampled Teachers do not have the background knowledge to provide high quality counseling and guidance for parents about child related issues.
- Sampled Teachers disclosed that as preschool teacher this creates confusion in parents' minds about the trustworthiness of the information we provide.

Understanding and approval of parents towards referrals

- Sampled teachers describe that parents' understanding and approval of child's problematic behaviors and abnormality was the thing of understanding and approval of parents for referral.
- Sampled teachers describe that, sometimes parents do not accept the existing problems with their children. In this situation, as preschool teacher it is hard to cope with this situation and requires professional help.
- In times, if we are able to achieve the acceptance of parents, then we go on our way of referral, but if there is rejection of the problem by the parents, it is problematic to take the help of professional for the child. In these cases, we need to make parents believe that we care and value their children.

Role of the parents

- Sample teachers concerns about the sincerity of the parents regarding need of the child care professionals help in the upbringing of child.
- Sample teachers were not sure that parents understand about their children psychological needs, when we discussed to them they always say yes, respond that we always do what you say.
- Sample teachers describe that we just rely on the observation of behavior of child and try to understand whether the parents comply with our suggestions about children. When we observe the child and see that there is no improvement, then we understand that parents do not comply with our suggestions. We do not know how to secure the sincerity of the parents and we need the help of professionals in these concerns.

Teacher and Child affiliation

- Sampled teachers indicated that, we are not good at psychological testing and observation but are good at teaching strategies. Sometimes we participate in children's play and share the roles, like we will be Teacher and you will be the mother, then he enacts his mother's behaviors. Participatory learning skills are our techniques to analyze the child.
- Sampled teachers indicated that, the psychological status of the child is directly revealed in social plays; however, I do not feel adequate in observing child's behavior during social plays.

Readiness for school

- Sampled teachers indicated that, depending on our observations, we can say that children feel so alone at the beginning of the session, especially the ones starting to school for the first time.
- Sampled teachers describe that we usually are talking to the children like—this is the resting time, you do not have to sleep—but, I was unaware of the psychological pressure and fear they felt due to starting to school and being in a new environment.
- There are adaptation problems for newcomers. They prefer to be alone at a corner in the classroom, they do not participate in play, refuse to talk, share, and participate.

From theory to practice

- Sampled teachers also reflected problems in putting theory into practice.
- Sampled teachers indicated that, the diploma education provided me with full of valuable information. However, when you come into the classroom and stand in front of the children, everything is different from what you have in your head. You thought that your knowledge was perfect to deal with all kinds of situations in the classroom. There are various kinds of ways to get through to the child. Each passing day, you feel that you need to read and learn more in this profession.

Problematic behavior and coping strategies

- Participants were asked to discuss the various complicated and problematic behaviors of the students, they came across in their daily classroom.
- Participants also indicated the need of in-service training to get professional information and assistance on these issues. Teachers revealed that they were lack of knowledge about proper inclusion.
- Participants were also asked about the problematic behavior coping strategies in the classrooms. They were also sequenced from the most common to the least common as positive reinforcements, social story reading, having children to think about the causes and consequences of their behaviors, implying drama and using movies, ignorance of the negative behaviors, elimination of the predisposing causes, and explanatory talking. Teachers explained that the coping strategies of problematic behavior were ineffective for in-class situations. They also emphasized that to deal with the problematic behaviors of the child professional counseling assistance was needed to work out with children and families.

What can be done?

- All the participants in this study emphasized the need for the school psychologist to work with teachers, children, and families in their schools. Teachers also indicated the need for the in-service training for the aforementioned problematic behaviors and coping strategies. Teachers indicated the need for school psychologists to provide parent education, testing, and

measurement for children and families, making appropriate referrals to outside agencies, providing information about child psychology, and preparing specialized education programs for teachers, children, and families.

Conclusions

Early childhood period constitutes the most crucial life span for the optimal later development and growth. Therefore, it is crucial for the early childhood professionals to comprehend early childhood development and growth and use this knowledge to advance the physical, cognitive, and socio emotional development of children to their full potential. Early diagnosis and treatment of young children's problems are crucial. Making appropriate referrals to specialists constitutes an important step in diagnosis and treatment process of early childhood disorders and problems (Schroeder & Gordon, 2002). However, as indicated in this small scale study, the teachers at the Indian preschools do not feel adequate to make accurate referrals to outside agencies, nor do they think that they have adequate professional information about child psychology. Besides, this study clarified the need for formalized training for counseling young children and their families in the field of early childhood education. Teachers also need support and in-service training about child and family related issues. It is clear that families and teachers greatly need ongoing professional consultancy on these issues. Findings of this study indicated the need for a school psychologist or counselor who can closely work with teacher and parents and provides accurate referrals to outside agencies for children and families and ensures coordination between schools and family. It is vital that professional counseling and guidance services for teachers, parents, and children need to be integrated into the Indian early childhood education system. This research constitutes an introductory study about the counseling and guidance services at the preschool. The research area needs to be supported by additional qualitative research conducted at the other regions and cities in the country and other cultures because of the vitality of the socio-cultural context of this issue. A large scale quantitative study could also help in determining the existing problems and in-service

educational needs of preschool teachers in the field of counseling and guidance services at the preschool levels.

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