Exploring the Concept of School Readiness amongst Parents, Teachers and Principals of Preschools Children

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Owing to its importance, school readiness has been central in the field of early education, child development and school psychology for many decades, yet several of its dimensions still remain unexplored. In Pakistan, there does not exist a well-articulated policy on early education. This paper aims to investigate how Pakistani parents, teachers and principals of preschools understand the concept of school readiness, the method adopted to assess the phenomenon and to look into the social and emotional problems the preschoolers face. The data for the study was collected from Rawalpindi, a city of Pakistan. The city was divided into three strata from which the preschoolers were selected randomly. The qualitative method was adopted using focus group discussion as the main tool of gathering information required for the study. The data analysis revealed that the parents attach high degree of importance to school readiness and are ready to send their children to school as soon as he/she has developed an adequate level of communication skills, regarding these skills as the key to socializing and making friends in school and coping with emotional needs. The teachers, on the other hand, insisted that children admitted to preschool level should be toilet-trained and have an idea of basic alphabets and numbers. The principals, however, emphasized on physical and mental health of children. Yet, all the respondents were of the view that preschool preparations play a major role in building the emotional and social profile of a child. They were also unanimous in their views that three years is the right age when a child is ready to go to school. They saw separation anxiety and emotional readiness are the impediments for the settlement of a child in the school which needs to be taken care by teachers for assisting child's adjustment.

Keywords. School readiness, preschoolers, school authorities

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"School readiness" is a complex phenomenon and difficult to define as it means different things to different stakeholders. School readiness means that a child has reached a certain level of emotional, developmental and cognitive development and skills that are needed for effective learning, functioning and working successfully in school. Although there is no formal definition of school readiness, the attributes associated with this notion include literary ability, cognitive skills, social, emotional and physical development (Brown & Lan, 2015).

The issue of school readiness always occupied an important place and has been in the heart of inquiry in several fields including early education, child development and school psychology for long time. Research has shown that the knowledge and skills that children possess before their entry to school are precursor of later achievements, making it a subject of utmost significance.

According to Rafoth et al. (2004), school readiness is a very crucial and important issue of concern for preschool education. It needs to be evaluated before a child is enrolled to a kindergarten. Attributes such as developmental capability, knowledge of colors, letters and alphabets have been used to assess school readiness (Kessler, 1991). Ignoring such an evaluation implies a false belief that all children have same mental level and are expected to carry out tasks in same fashion. There is a large amount of empirical evidence available that rules out this belief. Children growing up in different social environments experience different mental growth and develop cognitive intelligence different from their peers. Development of mind based on learning by individual varies across societies and within societies. The socio-constructivism theory supports intellectual differences among children (Vygotsky, 1978). It is generally addressed by schools in their own capacity depending on their own interpretation of school readiness.

According to their research, the philosophy of school readiness doesn't rely on age alone, but certain cognitive functioning must be achieved to meet the expectations of the school. By not paying enough importance to school readiness, the educators and schools put undue burden and pressure on the child to perform better at school, which he might be unable to do so. So, it can be said that a child's success and progress at school depends largely on his developmental and cognitive maturity rather than age alone. Hence, the concept of school readiness should be an integral part of assessment of preschool children at the time of entry into preschool.

For the most part, school readiness is a developmental concern. Child development is not an inert incident but rather a continual dynamic process in which a child undergoes physical, emotional, cognitive, neurological, social and psychological changes over a critical period of time. All these changes are fundamental and play a crucial role in shaping the child's readiness, and making him able to learn certain concepts and skills in school. The term school readiness is viewed and regarded, generally, as a predetermined construct which implies that there is a fixed set of physical, emotional and social development, which consists of certain linguistic and cognitive skills that must prepare children to meet school and curriculum requirements (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012).

Significance of Early Childhood Education

Today, governments fund researchers, organizations, policies and devise intervention and programs for early years' education and to prepare the young children to enter school 'ready to learn'. As discussed earlier, early childhood is the foundation of learning and education and paves way for future achievement and success. So it is very important to focus on early years of education as it is a very crucial time for learning. Research has shown that early years' education perks up children's well-being, minimizes the detrimental effects of poverty, makes learning outcomes more impartial and creates a foundation for lifelong learning (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012).

Theoretical Framework of School Readiness

School readiness is a developmental issue hence much of the theoretical backbone of school readiness comprises of developmental theories and pedagogy. In its purest sense, there is no set theoretical background for school readiness but rather the theories support readiness once the children enter a preschool. These theories are very important and vital as they encompass the principles of learning and development. Hence, theories of child development and learning intertwine with pedagogy to make different models of preschool education that prepare the child to the world of learning and knowledge. Educators have established early childhood as the right age for directive learning and have highlighted the value of experiences in early learning. The works of Montessori, Steiner, and Froebel are based on developmental theories of Piaget, Vygotsky and Waldrof etc. and converge on a single point that quality always precedes quantity (Elkind, 2001).

Factors Affecting School Readiness

According to Bingham and Whitebread (2012), early years are the fundamental years for a child to learn and develop according to his full potentials. *"Children develop quickly in the early years and a child's experiences between birth and age 5 have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right. Good parenting, and high quality early and pre-school learning, together provide the foundation children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up" (p.8).*

Although early social experiences produce children of different aptitudes, there would be marks of cognitive and social skills that one might consider useful for school entry. Early child development is influenced by factors including nature of relationship with parents, extent of cognitive stimulation, access to health care and nutrition, house condition and neighborhood etc. (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Major Factors influencing school readiness are:

1. Socioeconomic Status.
2. Physical and Psychological Health.
3. Life Experiences.
4. Familial Factors.
5. Parenting.

In the developed countries, policymakers have put great stress and emphasis on early childhood years to promote competencies that form the basis of future academic success (Vi-Nhuan et al., 2006).

School Readiness in Pakistan

Is school readiness a concern for Pakistani parents? There is no study available to show how many parents starting thinking of preparing their ward for going to school or taking measures which make their children 'ready for school'. According to a report by British Council (2009), about 92% of the people of Pakistan thought that system of education was an important issue of concern. This study also showed that mothers were more concerned about the educational future of their children.

However, the encouraging sign is that recently there has been some interest in Early Childhood Education (ECE) that is reflected in National Education Policy, 2009 and National Plan of Action 2001-2015 (Sayeed, 2011). While early education is slowly gaining attention in education sector, the situation with regard to preschooling looks pessimistic. Preschool Education in Pakistan has been mostly

catered by the private sector, although no data is available on preschool education in this sector. The public sector, on the other hand, offers little or no solace for the education of preschool children ranging in age from 3-5 years. The National Education Management Information System (NEMIS) in Pakistan collects education data annually. It covers public sector but not the private sector. Another source is the National Education Census (NEC) provides a look into current conditions in education including the private sector. Their combined data only shows that in 2005-06, 7.5 million children were studying in Pre Primary, and no data was available exclusively for Preschool education (Lynd, 2007).

This points to the direction that school readiness is an important issue that needs to be addressed. As mentioned above, there is not much information available on the situation of school readiness in Pakistan, thus, it is hard to find out what parents, teachers and principals of preschools think about school readiness. Thus, there exists a gap as to the perspectives of these stake holder on the issue of school readiness and, in particular, what the regard more significant in the order of importance of these factors.

The present study aims to fill this gap to the extent of the points of views of parents, teachers and principals on school readiness and what, in their views, deserve more attention that the other prerequisites. In addition, the study also aims at enhancing of our understanding of the phenomenon and make this information available to important stakeholder so they can plan ahead in order to overcome the challenges confronted in school readiness.

Rationale of the Study

The basic rationale of the present study is to understand the concept of school readiness; and to recognize what the school authorities (principals), teachers and parents understand about school readiness. Moreover, this study also aims to analyze the methods of assessments used for assessing school readiness among preschoolers. The study is needed because as has been established in the literature that pre-schooling plays a vital role in how children will perform in the later part of their educational career.

Objectives
1. To understand the perceptions of parents about school readiness of a preschooler.
2. To understand the views of school authorities' principals and teachers about school readiness.

3. To analyze the methods of assessments used for assessing school readiness among preschoolers.

Method

Research Design

Present research is based on phenomenological research approach to explore the concept of school readiness. Thematic analysis was used as method of analyzing data.

Sample and sampling strategy

Sample of the present study was obtained from Rawalpindi, a city located in the province of Punjab in Pakistan (33° 36 N and 73° 02 E), and a twin city with the capital of Pakistan, Islamabad. Its population is 3,363911 (2007, Census) and has approximately 600 children per school (Wikipedia). Urban area of Rawalpindi can be divided into three main strata namely Cantonment, Satellite Town and mid city area. List of preschools present in each stratum was obtained from the private school association Rawalpindi office. Using random tables ten preschools were selected from each stratum. The selected schools were approached and there using convenient purposive sampling technique following sample was selected for phase I.

a. Ten parent (five teachers, five mothers) from three schools one from each strata.
b. Nine teachers (three from different schools of each strata)
c. Six principals (2 each from different schools of each strata).

After getting consent form the parents, teachers and principals they were provided with the conveyance to reach mutually agreed common venue for the focus group discussion. Selection of sample for phase II was done as under:

The main aim of this study was to develop an indigenous scale for the understanding of reverse culture shock faced by Pakistani students after their return from abroad to the homeland. So for this purpose below mentioned steps were followed in two phases.

Area	No of Preschools (Randomly selected)	No of Parents	No of Teachers	No of principals
Cantonment	10	16	8	6
Satellite Town	10	16	8	5
Mid City	10	18	8	5

The preschools were picked up through random selection. The availability of parents, teachers and principals was sought through persuading them to participate in the study and their consent for responding for the study was obtained.

Instruments

Focus group discussion and semi structured interviews were used as method of data collection.

Phase I: Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Parents were approached in three preschools. Formal permission was sorted from the school authorities and common room of a school was used for the group discussion. Parents were informed about the objectives of the study. The researcher assured the participants about the privacy and confidentiality of the collected information. After their permission and satisfaction the parents' group discussion started. Initially the conversation had a low pace but after a few initial questions it picked up momentum and the participants actively took part in discussion and offered their opinions and view freely. The conversation was recorded so that no important information was missed out. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Phase II: Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Parents (25 couples; all having at least two children with age of 2 to 5 years) were contacted at their homes after a proper consent, proper procedure of interview was used and the average duration of each interview was approximately 34 minutes. The interviewer asked the questions and the responses were noted down by confidant/ helper.

After taking formal permission from institution, the teachers were contacted in advance and they gave an appointment for the interview. A total of 24 female teachers from institutions were interviewed for the study. When they were contacted they raised their concerns about shortage of time, as Montessori classes were busy in taking exams, they were willing to give only 10 to 15 minutes for interview. Keeping in view their commitments, it was agreed upon that the interview would not take more than 30 minutes. The interview took place in the activity common/staff room of the preschool. The interviewer asked the questions and the responses were noted down by confidant/helper.

A total of 16 principals (2 male and 14 female) were part of this study. The principals could not give more than 20 to 30 minutes for

the interview, due to their busy schedule. Therefore, it was agreed upon that the interview would not take more than 30 minutes. The interview took place in the offices of the principals. The interviewer asked the questions and the responses were noted down by confidant/ helper. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results

The objectives of present research were achieved through a qualitative study. The research was carried out in two phases.

Phase I consisted of focus group discussion with parents, teachers and principals separately. As a result of this discussion, the responses generated are appended at Annexure A to C. On the basis of the responses generated twelve themes were identified with help of a committee consisting of researcher, supervisor two PhD scholars, a principal and a teacher of a preschool.

In Phase II, the sample was requested to respond on the questions established after phase I. Responses of parents, teachers and principals were noted.

Phase I

Focus group discussion-1. For the parents' group discussion, ten parents (5 mothers: 5 fathers) participated in the discussion. The questions asked were:

1. When should it be started?
2. What are the indicators for its readiness?
3. What role does school readiness play in the intellectual emotional and personality profile of child?

Interpretation

Most of the parents admitted that preschool children do not have much understanding of studies and academics. They wanted their children to start socializing in school through play and other activities. Parents also agreed that young children easily adjust to the classroom environment and academics. They stated that despite counter arguments, by 3 years of age children are fully adapted to school life and learning at a very fast pace. Results of this exercise are given at (Annexure A).

Focus group discussion-2. In the second group discussion, nine female teachers participated. They were asked the same questions as to the parents' group. Additional questions were also asked keeping in mind their role and responsibilities. The data was recorded and analyzed.

Interpretation

Teachers understood school readiness in terms that a child who is coming to school must be ready emotionally and physically to enter school and school life. But at that young age it is established that children don't know much about studies or academics. We just have to know that they are ready to start making friends and learning through play. The younger the child is the easier it is for him to get settled. Older children take longer time to adjust. No matter how much they are ready or not, by 1.5 or 2.5 months, they fully adapt to the school life and learning at a very fast pace. Though it might look like they are small babies but their learning process is very quick and sharp. And at this age, they not only respond quickly, but remember what is taught to them forever in their later lives. A child's confidence is very important at this stage. A child who is confident will like school sooner and better, makes friends easily and learns quicker. The details are appended at Annexure B.

Focus group discussion-3. In the principals' focus group discussion, four female principals and two male principals participated in the discussion. They were asked to discuss on the same parameters of school readiness, as to parents and teachers. Yet, some additional questions were included keeping in view their role and responsibilities. The same procedure was adopted in data record and analysis.

Interpretation

In their view, when a child comes for admission in pre-school, principals are fully aware of the fact that he/she has to be prepared to be ready for school life. They do have certain way of assessing the level of the child preparedness for school. Preparedness should be physical and mental. But sometimes a child looks physically weak but he or she is mentally as normal as any child. Detailed results of this exercise are given at Annexure "C".

Phase II

Phase I laid the foundation for the main study of present research. Main study consisted of interviews from parents, teachers and

principals. Collected information from phase I was used to make the questions (Annexure-D) regarding school readiness, covering mainly these aspects;

1. Perception of preschool education,
2. Assessment of child in preschool,
3. Problems of preschool children
4. Perceived advantages of preschool in different domains of development.

In order to fulfill the objectives of the study, the data generated in Phase I by parents, teachers and principals (Annexure A-C) was analyzed and 12 questions were extracted (Annexure D). The emerged themes from responses of parents, teacher and principals are given in the following tables:

Table 1

What do you understand by school readiness?

Theme1

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• Able to look after him/herself • Basic knowledge of alphabets/counting/ haroof-e-tihajji • Interest in learning, writing and drawing • Mentally and physically healthy	• Physical and emotional readiness of the child • Toilet-trained • Good grip at holding • Willingness to go to school • Good health • Can bear the burden of school work	• Able to take care of themselves • Social behavior is appropriate • Emotional behavior is appropriate • Toilet trained • Physically healthy

Table 2

When is a child ready to go to school?

Theme 2

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• Ability to look after him/herself • Basic knowledge of alphabets, counting, haroof-e-tihajji • Interest in learning, writing and drawing • Physically healthy • Toilet trained • Age appropriate speech	• Good grip at holding things • Toilet trained • Confident • Social readiness • Interest in exploration of new things • Physical readiness • Emotional readiness • Willingness to go to	• Take care of themselves • Spend time independently • Social behavior is appropriate • Emotional development is appropriate

and language development • Ability to make friends with other children • Know his/her own name and names of parents • Overcome separation anxiety • Financially healthy parents	school • Express himself/herself	

Table 3

What are the physical requirements a child should have to attend the school?

Theme 3

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• Enjoys social interactions with his age fellows. • Enjoy group activities. • Can speak better and communicate more effectively.	• Physical readiness • Interested in learning • Can bear the burden of school work • Good health • Healthy eating habits • Emotional readiness • Confidence • Less separation anxiety • Willingness to come to school • Encouragement from parents • Eye contact	• Counseling by parents for mental readiness • Physically healthy

Table 4

What are the social and emotional prerequisites for a child for starting a school?

Theme 4

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• Could speak effectively • Could overcome separation anxiety • Should be able to interact socially/enjoy social interaction with age fellows	• Emotional readiness • Confidence • Willingness to come to school • Less separation anxiety • Young child settles more easily • Interested in learning	• Physical and mental readiness of child before joining the school • Physically healthy

Table 5

What skills a child should possess for being ready to go to school?

Theme 5

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• Basic knowledge of alphabets, counting, haroof-e-tihajji • Age appropriate speech and language development • Overcome separation anxiety • Know his/her name and names of parents • Toilet trained • Interest in learning • Ability to make friends with other children	• Less separation anxiety • Good grip at holding things • Possess basic knowledge of names of colours, days of week, could differentiate between shapes • Toilet trained • Language development	• Developed motor skills/ possess fine motor skills • Developed oral skills • Toilet trained • Confident and active • Are able to take care of themselves

Table 6

Types of methods used to assess school readiness for a child

Theme 6

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• Better speech and communication skills • Basic knowledge of alphabets, counting, haroof-i-tihajji • Interest in learning, drawing and writing	• No strict method of assessment • Good grip at holding things • Basic knowledge of colours and shapes • Language development • Observation of coloring and drawing skills	• Informal assessment procedure • Assessment of child's fine motor skills • Oral test related to age specific general knowledge about child himself and his surroundings • Interest in classroom

Table 7

How do you address the separation anxiety of a child?

Theme 7

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• 1-2 weeks • Normal process • Parents should encourage school-like activities	• It automatically finishes after 1.5 – 2 months • Keep children busy in activities • Children enjoys playing • Socialization is key to adjustment • Self-concept in relation to interaction with others	• Normal phase • fades with time • building self confidence • Encourage interaction among peers • Telling stories • Sharing lunch • Busy in activities • Show love and care • Extra attention

Table 8

What are the benefits of schooling for preschool child?

Theme 8

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• Social interaction • Enjoys group activities • Confidence building • Personality grooming • Skill development/ building • Psychological growth • Healthy and disciplined routines • Intellectual creativity • Social skill development • Independent thinking and behavior	• Young child settles more easily • Quick learning • Sharper memory • Good adjustment to school • Develop social relations • Are emotionally strong and healthy • Learn good manners to interact with others	• Early admission means early adjustment to the school environment • Early schooling covers gap of knowledge among children • Socialization is the main milestone of pre-schooling • Confidence development

Table 9

What are the common behavioral problems of child entering a school?

Theme 9

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• No fixed routines • No significant activity of child • Play is the most significant part of their child's day	• Children enjoys playing and activities only • Do not show interest in organized work or studies • Toilet training related issues • Birth of sibling causes behavioral issues and results in lack of interest of child in activities	• Child usually shows behavioral problems due to age or learning home life • Children usually cries and screams during early stages • Boys are more hard to control than girls. they are more aggressive and difficult to manage • Toilet training and related problems • Children belonging to domestic families show more behavioral problems

Table 10

What are gender based behavioral problems and which gender is difficult to manage?

Theme10

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• Boys are naughty • Boys are sometimes aggressive • Girls lack confidence and are shy	• Aggression and temper tantrums in boys • Quiet and shy girls are problematic, and take time to adjust	• Boys are more aggressive than girls hence are more difficult to be controlled • Girls usually become quiet and shy

Table 11

What are the most commonly used methods of instructions?

Theme11

Parents	Teachers	Principals
• Play and teach	• Montessori method • Behavior modification for slow	• Most preschool rely on Montessori method • Emphasize learning

	learners	through use of materials
	• Giving stars and sweets to motivate for work	• Develop interest in various educational activities
	• Coloring	• Showing cartoons and movies
	• Recognition of objects, numbers and shapes	
	• Recognition of alphabets through phonics and sounds	
	• Concepts such as up/down, big/small	
	• Practical learning	

Table 12

What specific training is required for pre- school teachers?

Themes 12

Parents	**Teachers**	**Principals**
• Montessori qualified	• Montessori qualified	• B.Ed/ M.Ed
• Good personality profile	• B.Ed/M.Ed	• Montessori qualified
• Polite	• Experience in school	• Skills to handle children
• Has a lot of patience	• Skilful in handling small children	• Foreign courses for handling and educating toddlers
• Well educated		
• From a good family		
• Loving and caring		

Discussion

The present study aimed at gaining some insight about the views parents, principals and teachers hold about school readiness. A study carried out by Puccioni (2015) showed that the ideas and beliefs parents have about the early schooling process has a positive influence on their parenting practices and in turn it has a positive influence on children's outcomes in early education. For the present study, a qualitative research design was formulated, which consisted of two phases. First category was related to type of school readiness. Parents,

teachers and principals expressed their opinion about it (See Table 1). Children who have developed the ability to manage their feelings are usually more successful as they enter school. Similarly children who like to play with other children and easily make friends also adjust to the school with ease. Principals included development of age-appropriate social behavior and emotional development as important in school readiness. Social behavior includes talking to other children or at least replying to the fellow students and teachers. A study conducted by Piotrkowski et al. (2000) showed that both parents and teachers agreed that children must be healthy, be socially competent, communicate well and have basic knowledge and skills before their entry to preschool. Researches have shown that achieving milestones in early math and literacy are predictive of later academic success; and good social skills and self-control are central to better performance in school and peer relationships (Breen, 2015).

Appropriate age for school readiness was also discussed by parents and principals (See Table 2). But considering the perception of principals in present study they even considered 2.5 years for admission in their schools. This statement comes from the fact that nowadays in Pakistan even toddlers as young as 2.5 years old are taken in reception classes. This trend has been promoted largely by the Private Schools, and it is largely perceived that they do it just to earn more money. Even the results from parents revealed clearly that they also think that three years is the ideal age to start school. Though research has shown that children who are older in age at start of school generally know more than their younger peers (Denton & West, 2002), but nonetheless, this doesn't indicate that young children cannot benefit from school environment (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Children coming for admission in preschools do not usually have previous experience of spending time without parents or other family member for four to five hours daily so on the whole physical health is perhaps a requirement and an underlying need for a child's positive approach to and commitment to learning (Cappelloni, 2011).

Teachers' understanding and conceptualizations of school readiness is very important because the conceptualization teachers have about school readiness impacts their style of teaching and also their relationships with children (Brown & Lan, 2015).Parents and teachers narrated the role of preschool in building self confidence in children and socialization (See Table 8). There were many other benefits which were elaborately discussed by parents and are categorized separately with their themes (See Table 8). Children learn to create things learn excitement, passion and enthusiasm from other children and learn the logic, which is known to be a pre-requisite for

school readiness (Cappelloni, 2011). There has been tremendous research that shows the significance and importance of play for children. The respondents' views about play are supported by research done by Frumborg and Gullo (1992) which concluded that play enhances social skills, and creativity and language development. Another research by Frost (1992) also found similar a result stating that play is the tool best designed for development of language, social skills and perceptual motor abilities (see Table 9).

Today, most children get toilet trained between the ages of 21 to 36 months. Research also shows that before 24 months, a child is not able to master toilet training (Choby & George, 2008). Toilet training and its techniques are consistent with the child's developing concept of self, and the development of physical abilities, vocabulary and self-esteem. Studies show that training a child is successful once the child understands the concepts of parental and societal expectations and also develop their own need for independence and self-actualization (Stadtler, Gorski, & Brazelton, 1999) (Table 4). Moreover, teachers also discussed the behavior changes in child after birth of sibling (see Table 9). It is natural for parents to manage their attention between their first born and second born and similarly it is natural for first born to feel rivalry towards second born for taking attention of parents which was his before. Teachers observed change in behavior of child in such situations. According to principals (See Table 9) children have diverse interests and activities as they belong to different families. Home environment and family situations have different impact on children. As the previous research findings accepted the impact of environment on children and children's own temperament affecting the environment, therefore this relationship is bidirectional. Research has shown that children with disruptive behaviors, difficulties paying attention, and poor with forming social relation with peers show less interest in classroom activities and show more disciplinary problems (Arnold et al., 1999; McClelland, Morrison, and Holmes, 2000). In Montessori method of teaching, children learn to work in groups and learning takes place through manipulation and sensing of materials (Moyer, 2013).

During the study it was observed that parents and teachers discussed the issue openly. Parents had diverse and multidimensional views on school readiness and what they expected from their children before their entry into school. Teacher's views were mostly one-dimensional as they were trained in the methods of handling preschool children. They had an understanding what is meant by school readiness. They emphasized on the mental readiness of the children, responding that child should be able to remember alphabets/numbers.

Principals were the most reserved sample of the study and had the monetary concept of school readiness. Their concept of this readiness mostly involved inducting more children in their school. There only concern was that a child is ready for school if he is toilet trained is able to take care of himself. Appropriate social and emotional behavior was also their concern. Present study highlighted the need that children who get emotional and social support attention at school show better vocabulary, social skills and enthusiasm for learning. Same result were found by Brooks Gunn and Mark man in 2005.The study offers an insight for the policy makers on preschool education and will be able to draw rational parameters for educating parents, teachers and school authorities on the issue.

Limitations

One of the major limitations was the small sample size of the study restricted only to one city of Pakistan. Although the sample size was adequate for a small scale qualitative study, but if the sample had been a little large, there would have had more variability and diversity in the opinions expressed by the parents, teachers and principals, and, moreover, the results would have been easy to generalize.

Recommendations

For any further study, it is suggested that sample size be increased; more cities can be included. So the results can be generalized and more variability in the result is achieved. This study can have many implications in the preschool system and also education policy making. Young children are deprived of learning opportunities through the medium of play and activity based learning and they are burdened more with academics and formal learning in the name of preschools. So the government should adopt a formal policy about preschools and their curricula so that children can gain maximum benefit from it.

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Annexure-A

Results of Focus Group discussion with Parents

Following major responses were obtained from the focus group discussion with the Parents.

1. All the parents had children aged 3 years and above.
2. Majority of the parents believed that they want their children to start their schooling when 3 years old.
3. All the parents seemed to agree that this age is appropriate to start school because children of this age can interact socially with others, and enjoy group activities.
4. Few parents said that this is the age when their children can speak better and communicate more effectively so this is an ideal age to start school.
5. Some parents said that this age is good for school starting because this is the time children learn to have confidence.
6. Some parents also thought children need more disciplined and healthy routines that school life offers.
7. The parents narrated the daily routines of their child, and all of them agreed that their child had no fixed routine and no significant activity all day.
8. Majority of the parents believed that play was the most significant part of their day.
9. Most of the parents said that entering school life should make children more confident.
10. Majority of the parents said that they think school should not focus on academics and studies alone but also focus on psychological and personality growth of the child to.
11. Most of the parents thought schools should focus more on creativity and skill building activities.
12. The parents believed that learning social skills is a vital aspect of schooling.
13. Few parents said that it should make the child more independent in his thoughts and actions.

Annexure-B

Results of Focus Group discussion with Teachers

Following information was gathered from the group discussion by Teachers

1. Most of the teachers agreed that a child who enters school must be emotionally and physically ready to enter school and school life.
2. Some of the teachers narrated that at such young age the child doesn't know much about studies or academics but their readiness is expressed when they start making friends and learn through play.
3. The teachers stated that a young child settles more easily than an older child, who takes longer time to adjust.
4. All of the teachers said that no matter how much a child is ready at entry, but within 1.5 or 2 months, all children are fully adapted to school life and start learning at a fast pace.
5. Majority of the teachers believed that children look small and look like babies at this age but their learning is very quick and they never forget what is taught to them in this age forever.
6. The teachers pointed out that confidence is very important at this age. Confident children like school more, make friends easily and learn quicker.
7. Majority of the teachers narrated that they don't have a strict method of assessment. It is just observed whether a child knows how to hold a pencil, see his grip on pencil, or if he can trace lines, knows names of colors and shapes, or days of the week etc.
8. Most of the teachers said that assessment was not fixed and only coloring and drawing of the children is observed. There is no right and wrong answer for such young children.
9. Most of the teachers said that some children are happy to come to school but majority of the children are sad and upset to leave their mothers and show irritating behavior.
10. The teachers said that children in reception or junior classes are happy to play and do various activities but they don't like to do more organized work or studies.
11. A different point was discussed by some teachers that only child is always problematic at beginning of school and they are difficult to manage. But during the running year whenever there is a birth of a sibling, the child's attitude in the class

changes and almost always they create some problems, and want more attention, or stop taking interest in activities.

12. It was informed by teachers that most children around three are somewhat toilet trained and they have 'ayas' and maids to manage any such issue. The teachers also told that for few weeks the parents are asked to send extra clothes or diapers to school.

13. Majority of the teachers said that at age of school entry, separation anxiety is a very normal and common phenomenon and it goes away after a few weeks. They said that the key to this issue is keeping children busy in activities. As soon as the child is free, they start crying again and became upset and miss their home and family.

Annexure-C

Results of Focus Group discussion with Principals

Following information was gained by the focus group discussion with the Principals.

1. Principals emphasized on the importance of school readiness and firmly propagated that every child should be sent to school by 3 years of age.
2. Majority of the principals reported that they follow assessment procedure to ascertain the child preparedness for school.
3. Some of the principals included both physical and mental readiness as aspects of school readiness.
4. Some of the principals reported that many a times that a child looks physically frail and weak but their learning skills are very good and they perform appropriately in class.
5. Majority of the principals believed that from 2.5 to 5 years, the child shows maximum learning; therefore this is the perfect age for children to start school because it provides them with maximum opportunities to learn.
6. Some of the principals also reported that even sometimes at admission, a child might not look ready for schooling but once admitted he/she easily adjusts to the environment and its demands.
7. Most of the principals stated that preschools rely on Montessori's method, so their emphasis is on learning through use of materials.
8. Majority of the Principals reported that they take children in junior Montessori or reception year between the age of 2.5 and 3.5 years.
9. Most of the principals reported to have informal assessment procedure used by their schools.
10. Most of the principals specifically mentioned the assessment of fine motor skills. For example handling pencil, 3 finger grip and coloring styles. Crayons are good tools for children because they are easier to grip.
11. Most of the principals also mentioned the oral test related to assessment of age specific general knowledge about themselves and surroundings. For example asking child's name names, parents' names, professions etc.
12. Most of the principals reported that the child that express more it shows their developmental progress.

13. Principals also reported about the behavior problems of preschool children.
14. Some of the principals attributed those behavior problems with their age.
15. Most principals also attributed behavior problems to the big change of leaving his/her home life and coming to school.
16. Most of the principals reported that boys are usually more aggressive and difficult to control than girls.
17. Most of the Principals stated that girls usually become quiet and shy.
18. Few Principals reported that girls sometimes try to replace their mother with the teacher by sitting with the teacher or trying to sit in their lap or standing close to her near her table.
19. Regarding management of the child, principals stated that it depends on the child and teachers mostly rely on their experience and feelings.
20. Principals also reported that kind and soft attitude as well as stern and strict attitudes are used according to the need and situation.
21. For other problems of age, such as toilet training and other related problems (for instance soiling of cloths and so forth), Principals mentioned about their staff (usually "ayas") for every class separately.
22. Principals also reported that toilet training is also an important target for the preschoolers and staff helps them.
23. Regarding separation anxiety, principals stated that behavior of children like crying and screaming is ignored and mostly children adjusts to the environment after short spells of crying.
24. Some principals narrated that mostly two weeks is the maximum period for the expression of this anxiety and then child adjusts to this separation.
25. Most of the principals believed that early admissions to the school mean early adjustment to the school environment and vice versa.
26. One principal narrated a personal account that she was very spoiled being an only sister of 3 brothers so her parents sent her to school at 4. But she was very cranky and showed behavioral problems so much that her principal sent her back to home and asked her parents to wait for another 6 months to send her to school.
27. Principals also accepted the individual differences among children. They stated that children behave differently in schools and it largely depends on their home environment and

brought up. At the same age some children are more active, knowledgeable, curious and alert and confident while others may not be so.

28. Some of the principals agreed that early schooling cover the gap of knowledge among children.
29. Principals also reported that children coming from families that have domestic problems show more behavioral problems than children who have peaceful domestic life.

Questions-Phase II

1. What do you understand by school readiness?
2. When is a child ready to go to school?
3. What are the physical requirements a child should have to attend the school?
4. What are the social and emotional prerequisites for a child for starting a school?
5. What skills a child should possess for being ready to go to school?
6. Types of methods used to assess school readiness for a child?
7. How do you address the separation anxiety of a child?
8. What are the benefits of schooling for preschool child?
9. What are the common behavioral problems of child entering a school?
10. What are gender based behavioral problems and which gender is difficult to manage?
11. What are the most commonly used methods of instructions?
12. What specific training is required for pre- school teachers?