



CURRICULUM TRANSITION PROCESSES FROM PRESCHOOL TO EARLY PRIMARY

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Abstract

Transition from Preschool to Primary is an area of concern that needs a lot of deliberation to sustain quality in education. A lack of understanding of ECCE and related transition processes has led to preschool curriculum becoming a downward extension of early primary curriculum. This study is aimed to understand curricular transition of social studies and mathematics from preschool to primary school at Muktangan, along with factors that support or hinder smooth transitions. This qualitative research was done in 5 preschools and 5 primary schools of Muktangan, Mumbai India. Interviews were conducted with 15 primary mathematics and social studies teachers, 14 preschool teachers, 5 primary head teachers, 5 pre-primary head teachers at 5 Muktangan primary schools where class observation and content analysis tools were developed. It was found that active, hands-on concrete learning processes followed in preschool was most beneficial to students when the same continued in early primary school. The strategies teachers used in grade 1 to facilitate understanding of mathematical and social studies concepts were similar to that of preschool. The early primary teachers were trained to understand curriculum transition and plan strategies based on the child's prior understanding of concepts. The study also revealed that both preschool and early primary teachers need to understand developmentally appropriate curriculum expectations at both levels in order to effectively address transition issues. This study helped in bringing out the need for continuity in teaching processes from preschool to primary and that awareness of transition issues can help emphasise the need for DAP in early years' education.

Key words

Curriculum Transition, DAP, Preschool, Early Primary, Sr.Kg

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Transition from a child's perspective can be quite challenging. Children begin to feel secure and attached to one kind of setting and routine in preschool and then suddenly are expected to adapt to another setting and routine in primary school. Most schools do not look at this as an issue and hence do not address it effectively.

Transition from preschool to primary school has been seen as an issue of educational practice and it has been discussed over a century and a half. Since the 1960's many

European countries had a pertinent question that was spoken and thought about, 'whether children's smooth transition from pre-school to primary school was in direct connection with the demand of achieving a blend between the two distinct curricula of these grades'. It is believed that there are long term negative effects and consequences like school phobia, functional literacy, dropout rates and so on, due to there being a lack of continuity in the process of teaching and learning in the transition from pre-school to primary school (Kalliope Vrinoti, n.d.). During this transition children may face problems like changing identity, understanding classroom rules, teaching styles, physical environment of school, complex social environment, less individual attention, inability of coping up with curriculum, problem of understanding concept, problem of following new pedagogy and gap between two curricula etc.

1.2 School readiness and transition in India

In India, preschool functions in the private and government sector. In the government sector it is through Anganwadis as part of ICDS program. The ICDS programs provide services in 13.42 lakh operational Anganwadis. (Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Women and Child Development as on 31/12/2014).

The ICDS scheme was initiated by the central government to provide comprehensive services covering, supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-ups, referral services, health education and nutrition, and preschool non-formal education for children aged from 0-6 years and their mothers (icds-wcd.nic.in/icds/icds.aspx). However its on field implementation has been limited to health and nutrition rather than any form of preschool education. As a consequence privatisation in early childhood services, is widely evident in India (Aruldoss, n.d.).

Private preschools are run by private bodies and NGOs that emphasize the importance for quality preschool education for children. Most children who receive quality preschool education come from the private preschools that are often stand-alone and do not follow-onto primary schooling in the same setting. The government Anganwadis are mostly housed close to a Zilla Parishad school and no communication or interaction is fostered among them.

In India the primary school is part of formal school education which are functioning both in the private and government sectors. In India the primary education sector follows any one of the authorised curriculum like, central board of secondary education (CBSE), Indian school certificate examination (ICSE), or any of the state boards. Primary schooling is considered as formal education which comes under the 86th amendment of the right to education act (mhrd.gov.in/rte). There are a lot of differences in its teaching subjects (Maths, Language, EVS), objectives, curriculum contents, teaching practices and pedagogy in both preschool and primary school. While the private preschools follow a private curriculum, updated pedagogy and focus on holistic or overall development of children, public primary schools follow structured curriculum and pedagogy of their respective affiliated boards. This country-wide ambiguity calls for greater attention of the transition of a child from preschool to primary school and quality in education in the early years. This crucial period of foundation developments during early years of a human, makes this transition all the more important. For successful school readiness, academic achievement and further holistic development of children.

Countries like United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Australia, China, Greece etc have acknowledged the need for some changes in their policies in accordance with

contemporary needs highlighted by recent research (Miguel Angel Urbina Garcia, October 2014). However not much research has been done on the topic of curricular transition in Indian context. One reference model is the “Bodh Shiksha Samiti” in Rajasthan that adapts an innovative approach of amalgamating curriculum and teaching approaches. The Bodhshala’sor school supports the children for seamless and easy integration of children from pre-school to primary and from primary to middle school. Data from a few schools that adopt this model indicates a significant improvement in the dropout rate in these schools (Arnold, n.d.).

1.3 Muktangam model

Muktangan has focused on transition processes since its inception in 2003 as an integrated model of preschool and primary school (aged 3 to 7 years) as well as an integrated model of teacher and school education. In 2004 the first batch of children experienced the transition process and teachers who taught them in the preschool progressed as class teachers with them to Grade 1, a process that has been predominantly followed at Muktangan till date.

The teacher child ratio was made more ideal from 1:15 in preschool to 1:6 to enable adult child interaction with individual children, but due to increased demand of admission into Muktangan schools the ratio is now maintained the same as preschool. The curricular planning was done on a daily basis to enable teachers to plan and design appropriate learning experiences, connecting concepts done in preschool to the curriculum and syllabus prescribed by the state board. The teachers moving with the children from the preschool to Grade 1 enabled successful implementation of this process to a great extent. The journey of school readiness and transition that began in 2004 continued and Muktangan has made an attempt to sustain the processes of smooth transition. Muktangan preschool and primary follow the ‘active-constructive’ philosophy that focuses on five major areas viz. the learning environment, daily routine, curriculum and assessment, adult–child interaction and parental involvement in education. From the school-transition perspective, Muktangan lays emphasis on, training teachers and putting into place processes that would ensure active-constructivism and smooth transition in these areas from pre-primary to primary.

1.4 Mathematics and Humanities in the early years

The curriculum of social studies in preschool of Muktangan deals with children’s daily routine, talking about self, family, home and neighbourhood, celebrating festivals, solving problem like in play, expressing and making choices, building relationship, expressing feelings in words and dealing with conflict. The curriculum of mathematics in preschools of Muktangan deals with the ‘pre’ number concept, describing similarities, differences, shapes, matching, time and space. The curriculum in primary school period is considered to be a beginning of formal reading, writing and arithmetic, culminating in the introduction of formal disciplines with time schedules as prescribed by the Maharashtra State Board.

1.5 Objectives:

This paper is based on the sustenance of the transition processes embedded in Muktangan since 2004. The study was initiated in 2015 and looked at the various components like the daily schedule, learning environment, assessment pattern and curriculum which effect the smooth transition of the children. In the following year 2016, the curricular transition in mathematics and social studies was evaluated.

The broad objectives of the study were

- To understand curricular transition while children are moving from preschool to Grade 1
- To understand the major factors and components which facilitate smooth curricular transition
- To understand the curricular transition issues which children face

2. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Data was collected by an intern through routine class observation in both senior KG and grade 1. The observation focused on the pedagogy, along with curricular objectives which are followed in both sections and both subjects. Teachers and Heads of kindergarten and grade 1 were interviewed by the intern using a pre-validated, structured questionnaire. The objectives of the interviews were to understand the perspectives of teachers and school heads who are closely engaged in developing curriculum and in teaching process for both grades.

Content analysis of both curriculum of senior KG and grade 1, in five preschools and primary schools mentored by Mukhtangan Faculty. The curricular content analysis was done to understand the curricular objectives, curricular content, curricular continuity and assessment of mathematics and EVS of senior KG and grade 1.

3. Results and Discussion

Interviews were held with 14 teachers of senior KG and 15 teachers of grade 1 in each subject. Five heads of preschool and primary schools, respectively were also interviewed. Data revealed that there was curricular continuity and pedagogical linkage that enabled smooth transition. All five preschool and primary heads agreed that curricular continuity and pedagogical linkage are factors to smooth transition. The pedagogy of active constructivism is uniformly followed in both senior KG and grade 1. While the idea of considering classroom as learning environment is practiced in both grades, daily routine changes to subject and periods were incorporated in grade 1 only. Another main aspect of pedagogical linkage is incorporating similar activities. The same activities like field trips, role play, action songs, observing surroundings, drawing surroundings, concrete object based kinesthetic activities are practiced in both senior KG and grade 1 for mathematics and social studies. The curricular continuity is seen in curricular objectives where it progresses from simple to complex. The curricular planning of mathematics and social studies in both senior KG and grade 1 are based on children's need and their interest. In assessment, the formative assessment is followed in senior KG and grade 1 for both mathematics and social studies. 30% mathematics of grade 1 is summative assessment. Data reveals that the content analysis strongly justifies the curricular continuity in mathematics and EVS. The curricular activities and curricular objectives of mathematics and EVS in Senior KG and Grade 1 are in strong continuation and flow.

Teachers who had previously taught in senior KG play a pivotal role in identifying transition issues in curriculum and pedagogy in grade 1. The handling of children is different among the grade 1 teachers who have already experienced teaching senior KG from those who have not experienced. In mathematics over 60% teachers were aware of teaching and curriculum of senior KG and could identify the transition issues. In EVS 35% grade 1 teachers had a clear idea about curriculum and pedagogy of senior KG and identified transition issues.

Preschool teachers were not aware of curricular transition issues that children face while they transit to grade 1. 60% teachers of senior KG were not aware of transition issues in

mathematics when children move to grade 1. The study also revealed that about 80% teachers did not know how mathematics is taught in grade 1. Also 80% senior KG teachers were not aware of transition issues in social studies while they are moving to grade 1. 80% KG teachers were not aware of transition issues at all, and did not have any idea of how social studies is taught in grade 1.

Pedagogical linkage and curricular continuity are the main factors in facilitating smooth transition. The findings in the study strengthen findings of several researches which considered the curricular discontinuity and pedagogical dislinkage as a main barrier in facilitating smooth transition. If children are admitted in primary school that which follows a different pedagogy from the preschool attended, then children take time to cope-up and the curricular discontinuity creates a gap between learning in preschools and primary schools. Parents and school authorities who take admission decisions for children moving to grade 1 need to think about pedagogical linkage and curricular continuity.

The awareness of grade 1 teachers and senior KG teachers about curriculum and pedagogy has a great role in identifying transition issues. The knowledge of child's previous learning helps teachers identify transition issues and facilitate smooth transitions and making teachings practices more effective to increase the learning level of students in classroom. Appointing KG experienced teachers in grade 1 or giving curricular awareness to grade 1 teachers or conducting combined meeting of teachers of senior KG and grade 1 to talk about curriculum of senior KG and grade 1, may help solve the problem of lack of awareness about curriculum and in dealing with transition issues.

4. Summary and Implications of the study

Results of this study mandates the need of a more detailed and large scale study on school readiness and transition in Indian context. The consolidated outcome of such research and suggestions by experienced professionals be brought in the attention of the national educational policy makers to petition for processes and policies that facilitate smooth transition from preschool to primary school. The disconnect between Aanganwadi curriculum and government formal schooling needs to be bridged through informed policies. A qualified ECD practitioner should continue teaching the child up to age 7. The inclusion of a unit on ECD in the D.El.ED programs could be deemed essential and in-service teacher education for teachers of Grade 1 could be made mandatory.

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