



## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY SCHOOLS IN INDIA

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### Abstract

*The culture of Play schools has progressed throughout the years in different forms like Kindergartens, Nurseries etc. The foundation of holistic education must be lay down with utmost care and stimulation at this period for all round development of the child. In this context role of Play school is very significant. The most essential ingredient found in Play schools is the provision of engagement of children in play. Play is one of the major way in which young children learn about the world around them. Play imposes significant contribution in development of language, gross and fine motor skills, cognitive abilities and socialization during early stages of learning.*

**Keywords:** Play school, Play



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### Introduction

The toddlers are very curious in natures who always try to explore their environment though variety of activities. Among these play is found to be most preferred. Play is an act of self-amusement which leads towards behavioral, social, and psychomotor and cognitive developments in children. Play is the means of interaction with the world. It is an integral part of academic affair which enhances children's learning readiness, learning behaviors and problem- solving skills. The children are accustomed in Play school environment with a better interest through playful activities.

Though children learn from environment in a natural way still they need guidance and support to receive appropriate education which prepares them to live confidently and

comfortably in the society. There are multiple contexts like the family setting, the school and the community which influence children's learning and development. Education at the early stage of life is well organised through Play schools. Play school has critical contribution towards behavioral development, physical development, cognitive stimulation, socialization, aesthetic sense, child development and early education. Exposure to Play schools help to reduce repetition and drop-out rates, improve school readiness, enhance school attendance, strengthen literacy and numeracy skills and increases school achievement. Play schools in India were flourished with establishment of kindergartens and nurseries on the same models: Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori, and the activities of missionaries. In Indian context Play school education has a long past starting from 1915 with establishment of Montessori school near Vadodara.

### **Historical Development of Play schools in India**

The drive of Play school education in India becomes systematic with Maria Montessori's visit to India in 1939. The first glimmering of interest in Montessori Method of education for establishment of Play schools in India was in Gujarat. Mahatma Gandhi mentions a visit to a Montessori school in India as early as 1915 in Amreli, in Saurashtra. Gijiubhai Badheka was the pioneer in field of Play school education through influence of Montessori method of instructions.

### **Historical Development of Early Education in India through Five Year Plans**

The systematic growth of early education through Five Year Plans can be discussed likewise:

- **First Five Year Plan (1951-1956):-** The first break through in organizing services for the preschool child came with the establishment of Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) in 1953 with the objective of promoting child welfare and development through 26 programmes for pre-school children. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) provided grants to voluntary organisations for initiation of 'Balwadis' in India.
- **Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961):-** During second Five Year Plan provision for child welfare and education was given priority to strengthen preschool education programme. Beside this efforts to popularize Balwadis were intensified.

- **Third Five Year Plan (1961-1966):-** The Government of India formulated a national policy for preschool education and emphasis was laid on the improvement of the existing Balwadis and training facilities for Balsevikas.
- **Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-1974):-** This period had a vision towards providing trained preschool teachers for quality preschool education in the country. Emphasis was on training of teachers evolving suitable teaching techniques, materials and guides and opening of Balwadis both in rural and urban areas.
- **Development during (1966-1969):-** In 1964 with formation of the IAPE (Indian Association for Preschool Education) new opportunities were available for Play schools. In 1966, the Education Commission gave suggestions for strengthening the pre-school education. NCERT set up the department for pre-primary and primary education in 1969.
- **Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1979):-** The Fifth Five Year Plan was launched in 1974 with interest to spread playschool education in rural, urban and tribal areas. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was started in 1975 with 66 pilot projects. Later 117 ICDS projects were introduced during 1978-80.
- **Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985):-** During this period The Government of India realized the importance of children with special needs and took valuable steps for their education .Under the central sector scheme, ECE (Early Childhood Education) programme was implemented by the state for the disadvantaged children.
- **Seventh Five Year Plan (1986-1991):-** The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) obtained its due place in the policy framework of National Education Policy 1986. The main concepts of the policy were:
  1. Recognition of the holistic development of the child
  2. Emphasis on play as medium of informal teaching
  3. Use of non-formal teaching methods
  4. Pluralistic and continuous approach
- **Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997):-** This period had the main aim of early childhood development focusing on STs, SCs, drought prone regions and urban slums. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) projects were grown to 2424 in number.

- **Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002):-** Ninth five year plan universalized Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme with objectives of promotion of child and maternal health, nutrition and preschool education for children aged 3–6.
- **Tenth Five Year Plan (2003-2007):-** The play way concept (Pleasure, Perception and Participation) in preschool was given due importance during this period. The process of learning through group activities using variety of games for lingual and numerical development was advocated at this period which made the basic learning process of present day Play schools.

### **Recommendations of National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 for Early Education**

In recent years, India has made significant progress with respect to strengthening the policy framework for Play school education programme. In this context National Curriculum Framework 2005(NCF-2005) has given systematic approach for early education. It has truly advocated that at early stage all learning occurs through play rather than through didactic communication. Rather than the rote learning of the number sequence, children need to learn and understand, in the context of small sets, the connection between word games and counting, and between counting and quantity. Making simple comparisons and classifications along one dimension at a time, and identifying shapes and symmetries, are appropriate skills to acquire at this stage.

### **Regulatory Guidelines for Private Play schools**

A major event in running Play schools in India is publication of regulatory guidelines for private Play schools for 3- to 6-year-olds by The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR- 2005). The regulatory guideline has addressed on various issues such as teacher-student ratio, curriculum, infrastructure and the age of admission apart from the safety and security aspects.

### **National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy in 2013**

To bring a systematic revision of early education programme the Government of India released the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy in 2013. It aims to promote quality and excellence in early childhood care and education throughout the country. It intends to provide rich early stimulation and quality learning experiences to all children from birth to pre-primary years. It emphasizes children's holistic development and learning.

## **Recommendations of National Education Policy 2020 on Early Education**

The National Education Policy 2020 has given priority to early education by restructured school curricula and pedagogy in a new '5+3+3+4' design. The first five years of schooling is considered as 'Foundational Stage'. It is envisaged that prior to the age of 5 every child will move to a "Preparatory Class" or "Balvatika". The learning in the Preparatory Class shall be based primarily on play-based learning with a focus on developing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities and early literacy and numeracy.

## **National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum (2022)**

The Government of India has framed a National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum Framework and the Quality Standards for ECCE in 2022 to provide an integrated curriculum framework for children aged between 3 and 8.

## **Some Pioneers in Field of Play schools in India**

In Indian context the Play schools flourished through efforts of some pioneers namely: Gijubhai Badheka (1885-1939), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Tarabai Modak (1892-1973), Anutai Wagh (1910-1992) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948).

### **Gijubhai Badheka (1885-1939)**

The key stone of Play schools in India was established by a famous educationist Gijubhai Badheka. Influenced by ideas of Maria Montessori he established Dakshinamurti Balmandir, a Play school in August 1920 where Montessori Method was oriented towards Indian conditions. Freedom and love was basic rule coupled with the use of music, dance, travel, story-telling and play-ground as instantly acquired popularity with children and parents. In 1924 he established the Dakshinamurti Training College in Bhavnagar for teacher training for Play schools.

### **Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)**

Famous educationist Rabindranath Tagore was a great admirer of Dr. Maria Montessori's philosophy and pedagogy. He introduced drama and arts as compulsory subjects in pre-school.

### **Tara bai Modak (1892-1973)**

Inspired by Gijubhai's experiments in early childhood education, Tarabai Modak, a social worker of Maharashtra, began working with him in Bal Mandir, a Play school in Bhavnagar. Tara bai established a school based on Montessori lines called "Shishu Vihar" in

Dadar, Mumbai. She founded Nutan Balashikshan Sangh a training course for teachers in 1938.

### **Anutai Wagh (1910-1992)**

Anutai Wagh was a great activist in Play school education programme in India. She had contributed a lot for the spread of Play schools among the tribal children. She obtained the primary teacher's certificate course at the Women's Training College in Pune in 1929 and continued to teach at a village school in the Nashik district. She was highly influenced by writings of Tarabai Modak and showed her immense interest in Play school. Anutai Wagh contributed a lot for the spread of Play school education among the tribal children, by starting a playschool at Bordi-Kosbad at Palghar and motivated tribal parents to send their kids to Play school by visiting their homes. Her education programme was quite interesting including playing, singing along with teaching. During her last years of life she did an exemplar work by setting up institutions like Grammangal, an organisation in Maharashtra for educating toddlers in poverty-stricken areas (1980s).

### **Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)**

Mahatma Gandhi emphasized for an inexpensive system of pre-school education in India and conceptualized the pre-basic education for children up to the age of seven years.

### **Increasing demand for Play schools in India in 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The Play school sector in India has taken a significant role in providing early education. The growth of Play school is driven primarily by factors such as rising parent awareness for early childhood education and care, coupled with rising number of nuclear families and working women in the country. Due to professional stress parents face difficulties in paying attention on their toddlers. This situation promotes more dependency on Play schools for better education of kids. Some of the popular Play schools which are preferred by parents are Bach pan, Kid zee, Euro kids, Hello Kids, Sai Angan Play school, the Tree house play group and Little Star Play school etc. The Play schools foster life skills at a young age to nurture the roots of the toddlers with value-based learning. Play schools in India promote child-oriented environment with specialized teachers for a better learning and fruitful day at kindergarten. The demand of Play schools is gaining popularity among parents both in rural and urban areas with more demand in later.

### **Problems in Play schools of India**

Though the Play schools are providing opportunity for early education to children, but their quality with regards to staff position and academic affairs is not very clear due to lack of government control. The role of private pre-schools has been criticized by many researchers with regard to their business in early childhood education forum. The cost or fee structure of these institutions is having serious business. Some of the problems in Play school sector can be visualized likewise:

- Cost of popular Play schools is found to be challenging for parents.
- Most of the Play schools follow their own curriculum and the course of study which is not regulated by the Education Department.
- Trained teachers are not adequately engaged in playschools.
- Student teacher ratio is not properly maintained.
- The teaching methodology used in play schools is not uniform.
- Availability of adequate play area for both indoor and outdoor play is not sufficient
- There are no acts or rules developed by the state government to regulate their educational activities.

This shows that there is need of proper regulatory process to monitor and control the Play schools in India to ensure quality education to children.

### **Research studies on Historical Development of Play schools**

Cenkner (1994) states that European-style pre-school programmes were introduced into India in small numbers in the early years of the 19th century as philanthropic and missionary efforts. Over time, western programmes were adapted according to Indian ideas on pre-primary education and on education in general, thus laying the foundation for the Indian approach to Play-based education.

Muralidharan and Kaul (1993) reported that in 1915 a Montessori school was established near Vadodara and in 1920 Gijubhai Badheka opened a pre-primary school named as “Bal Mandir” at Bhavnagar. The Bal Mandir was influenced by Maria Montessori, who is the foreign educator most often associated with Indian playschools. Much of the early interest in Montessori was centered in the state of Gujarat and then part of Maharashtra. The Bal Mandir incorporated western and Indian educational ideas in a Hindu nationalist context. Thus, there was considerable emphasis on religion (Hinduism), language (Gujarati) and culture (traditional music, art, dances), along with Montessori materials and activities.

Department of Women and Child Development, (1995) through its survey reported that Government of India's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) includes more than 350,000 preschool centers (*anganwadis*), serving approximately 10 million children in the age group 3–6. Started in 1975, the ICDS is the largest early childhood care and education programme in the world. The objectives of the ICDS are comprehensive, and they include promotion of child and maternal health (immunization, health check-ups, referral services, treatment of minor illnesses), nutrition (supplementary feeding, growth monitoring and promotion, nutrition and health education), and preschool education for children aged 3–6.

The study conducted by Rajalakshmi (1998) on Children's Garden School in Chennai revealed that two schools were established in India by Ellen Sharma and her husband Dr V.N. Sharma in 1936. The materials used in the school included Montessori-influenced items, such as cylinders, colour cards and geometrical insets, along with indigenous materials such as seeds for tracing the outlines of designs and letters (*rangoli*). In all aspects of the curriculum there was a focus on practical work, learning by doing, learning through self-effort.

Swaminathan (1998) in his study on private sector pre-schools wrote that most pre-school experts in India oppose the growth of an unregulated Play school education sector as in private Play schools untrained teachers in ill-equipped classrooms performed unsuccessful trials to make children learn three Rs, while ignorant managements enforced inappropriate curriculum and methods of teaching, at the cost of parents who, ironically, often paid a fee they could ill afford for this dubious 'service' resembling torture.

Faculty of Home Science, Maharaja Sirajarao University of Baroda (1999) in its 'Faculty Magazine' revealed that The Chetan Balwadi was a laboratory preschool established in 1949 at the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the Maharaja Sarajirao University of Baroda in Gujarat. Hallmarks of this new approach were low ratios of teachers to children, smaller group activities and more free play and child initiated activities. The role of children's activity and interaction in learning was stressed.

Bhogle (1999) in his study reported that in Play school setup there are different types of activities. Individual and small group activities may involve flash cards, lotto games and work sheets offering practice on number and reading problems. In preschool environment feelings of mutual care and interdependence were culturally reinforced and individuality and competition was discouraged.



## Suggestions

The demand for Play schools has increased among Indian Parents. Role of private Play schools in this sector is very crucial but they are expensive to attend. So this sector needs more attention. Some of the suggestions which can be taken into consideration for success of Play schools in India are given below.

- Play schools need to be strengthened with adequate infrastructural facilities.
- The teachers in Play schools should need to be properly trained to provide quality education to the toddlers.
- There is need of development of a Curriculum that enhances development and learning of toddlers.
- There must be regular monitoring of each child's activities and development to ensure all round development.
- More innovative practices should be available for making play way modes of transaction interesting.
- Private Play schools need to be regulated through Regulatory guide lines developed by Education Division of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights.
- Role of community participation need to be focused for successful implementation of Play school education programme in India.

## Conclusion

Through exposure to Play school education children become more independent and confident as well as attain all-round development. Children attending Play schools tend to learn more rapidly through an organised curriculum, learning aids and by interacting with other children. The main purpose of Play schools is to prepare children physically, emotionally, socially and mentally for formal schooling and to prevent poor performance and early drop out. It is highly essential to enroll children in Play schools to secure their educational journey for better life.

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