

PRESENT STATUS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE BATTICALOA DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century is said to be the century of the child and perhaps at no other time have children been so highly profiled. This trends continue to be in the 21st century as well.

Realization of the importance of human resource development for the future of a country has generated immense interest and creative thinking in the field of child development. Curiosity, creativity and language development are the important issues of child not only today but also for tomorrow which affect all round development of the children. These issues are interrelated and related to brain functioning (Bhoodev Singh 1997).

Calvin W.Taylor, a great creativity worker writes "There is nothing more complex and more - high tech than the brain. There is also nothing more challenging and more promising for educational improvements than activating and cultivating to full the brain and its hidden talents and energy resources both in its internal structuring and processing and in its external potentialities. - (Ibid p.xiv)

This all adds up to the policy that the development of great economic resources of thinking, producing and creating brain power talents should have high priority in education and in society than the capital resources or the natural resources because the development of the latter is fully dependent upon the former.

Preschool education is an indispensable instrument for the proper personality development of the child. Early years of the children are important because rate of growth and development is fastest and environmental influences are minimum. Habits and attitudes acquired in the early childhood are fairly deep rooted. Curiosity and creativity both are found biggest during this period.

Preschools are Institutions which provide education to children prior to their formal Primary education. In other words, the experiences gained by a child prepares him/her to enter the formal educational system. Age between 3 – 5 years of a child is generally known as Pre school going age. This early period is critical for the development of the brain. It is estimated that the brain achieve 90% of its growth by age 6. Chronic malnutrition during the early childhood years causes severe damage to the brain functions, particularly to cognitive functions on which learning depends:

The early childhood period is also considered as the age during which the establishment of a necessary moral foundation and a balanced personality with an expected behavioural pattern takes place in the child.

Education Programme for the children below the age of admission to formal schools came into existence from mid 20th century with the establishment of schools popularly known as Montessori Schools, specially in the Urban areas. From 1970's with the recognition of influence of Piagetian theories on child development which emphasized the importance of providing learning experiences to children from very early ages, preschools started to appear in large numbers extending to rural areas as well.

During the last quarter of the 20th century, religious organizations, NGOs, some local government bodies and even private persons established Preschools. With the proliferation

of Preschools and training programmes, disparity among Preschools in standards, facilities and other resources including teachers became wider.

The impact of the Preschools on the education system is noteworthy. A recent survey of the Preschools in the Island organized by Save the Children Norway (SCN) has revealed that even in very remote, under developed villages in several districts such as Puttalam, Chilaw, Gampaha, Matale, Anuradhapura and Hanguranketa, the establishment of Preschools has resulted in several beneficial changes.

OBJECTIVES

There are hardly any studies on Preschool system in the Batticaloa district due to the conflict in the past. Hence a study was initiated in 2001 with the following objectives:

- (i) To investigate the needs for organizing and managing Preschools.
- (ii) To study the methods of teaching/ learning process in Preschools.
- (iii) To investigate the problems faced by the teachers and principals of Preschools.
- (iv) To identify professional development needs of Preschool teachers and principals, and ways and means of improving Preschool performance.

METHOD OF STUDY AND COLLECTION OF DATA

Descriptive survey method is employed for this study. The purpose is to find out the present status of Preschools in the Batticaloa district by collecting data from a sample of preschools. On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected, this survey study tries to understand the present condition of Preschools in the Batticaloa district which were severely affected by the internal war for the last 19 years.

At present there are 428 Preschools in the Batticaloa district. For administrative purposes, the district has been divided into 3 education zones namely Paddiruppu, Kalkudah, and Batticaloa. The following table shows the number of Preschools in each zone and the sample selected. 12% of the schools were selected as the sample in each zone using random sampling technique. This is as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: Sample of Schools

Education Zone	Total no. of preschools	Sample Selected
Paddiruppu	133	15
Kalkudah	140	17
Batticaloa	155	18
Total	428	50

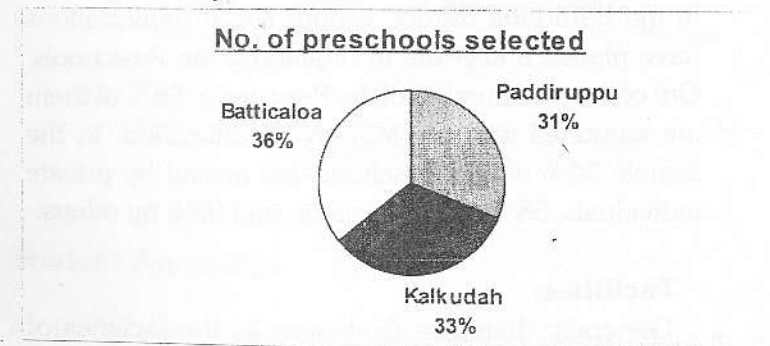


Figure 1: Sample

Collection of data was done by using two instruments – namely Questionnaire and Observation schedule. The Questionnaire included particulars related to the following aspects of the preschool -

- general particulars,
- details of buildings, and furniture,
- teaching - learning aids,

- health habits of children,
- problems of preschools,
- particulars of teachers,
- organizations which support preschools,
- community and parents.

Services of two field assistants were obtained for data collection. An unstructured Observation schedule was also used mainly to collect qualitative data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Simple mathematical and statistical techniques such as percentages, bar-charts and pie-charts were used for the analysis of data.

General Information:

In the Batticaloa district, various social organizations have played a key role in organizing the Preschools. Out of the total number of the Preschools, 96% of them are registered with the Ministry of Education. In the sample 34% of the Preschools are owned by private individuals, 58% by organization and 08% by others.

Facilities:

Generally there are limitations in the facilities of Preschools in the district. Lack of playing fields, lack of furniture and classroom space are some of the problems that PS's face. More than half the number of schools are facing acute shortage of furniture and over a third of the schools do not own playfields which is an important component of the facilities of a preschool. The following table shows the status of the facilities in the sample schools. This is further illustrated by figure 2.

Table 2 - Facilities

Facilities	No. of Schools			
	Possessing		Not possessing	
Playing field	64%	(32)	36%	(18)
Furniture	48%	(24)	52%	(26)
Equipment for learning	82%	(41)	32%	(09)
Classroom space	68%	(34)	32%	(16)

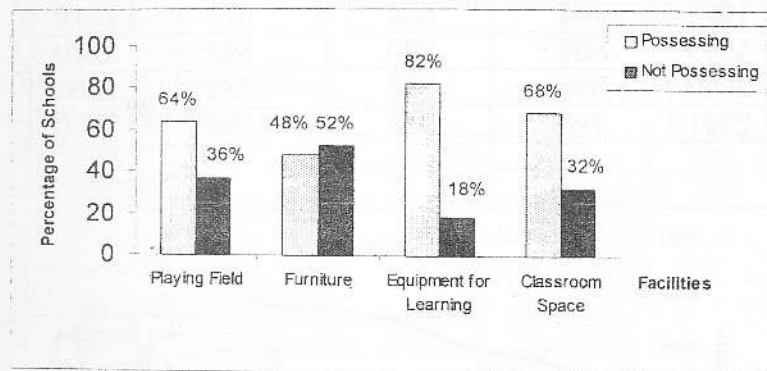


Figure 2 - Facilities

Student Population

As far as the student population is concerned, there is an increasing trend in the students' population. In 1996, the student population in the sample schools was 1666. There was a continuous increase in the following years and in 2001, the total population in the sample schools rose to 2340. This shows that there is a rapid growth in the enrolment in the Preschools in the district.

Fluctuations in the student number in each of the Educational Zones is observed and the rise and fall in the number of students followed a different pattern in the different zones. Further

information on this suggests that this varying pattern of student population was mainly due to displacement of families due to the war situation.

Table 3 – Growth of student population

Year	Zone			Total
	Batticaloa	Kalkudah	Paddiruppu	
1996	670	544	452	1666
1997	711	661	536	1908
1998	784	664	571	2019
1999	837	840	593	2270
2000	895	756	732	2383
2001	790	946	694	2430

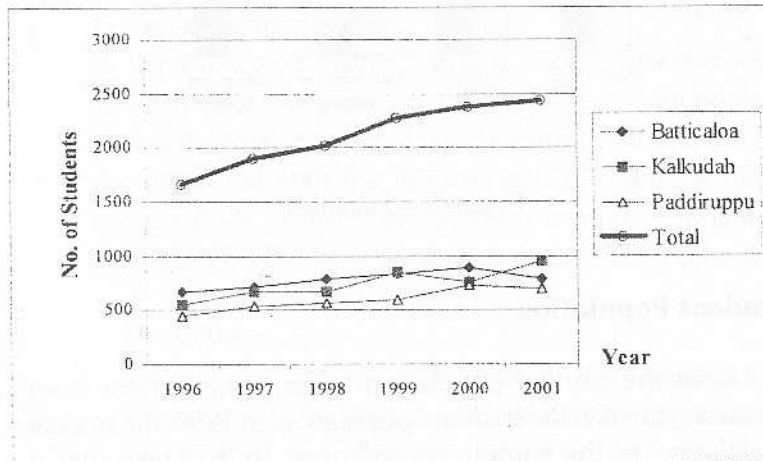


Figure 3 - Growth of student population

Student Behaviour

Information on behaviour patterns of students in the preschools was collected through the questionnaire. Seven aspects of behaviour were rated on a 3-point scale. The results are as indicated in Table 4, which is again represented visually by

Figure 4. The data indicates no serious problems, but the attendance of children to preschools and the use of audio – visual aids requires more attention. The following table shows the behaviour and percentage of schools indicating the student behaviour.

Table 4 - Students behaviour

Behaviour	Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Average
Happy in class	62	32	6
Without worries	40	46	14
Happy in using aids	64	28	8
Talking with other children	52	34	14
Talking with teachers	52	34	14
Attendance	38	36	26
Using learning aids	34	38	28

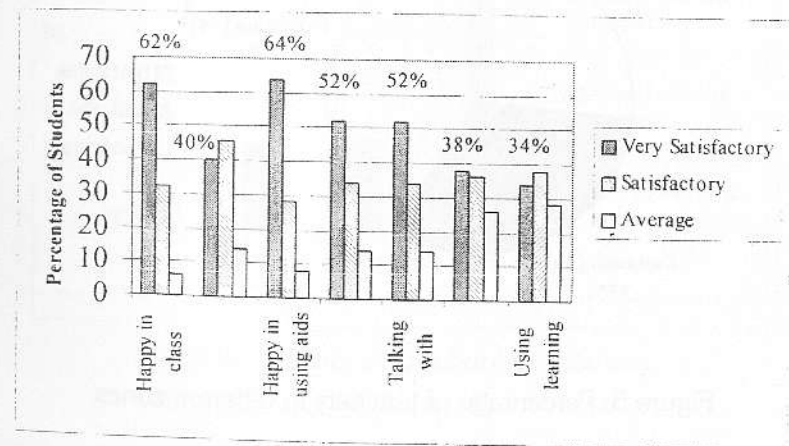


Figure 4 – Students behaviour

Preschool Teachers

In the schools studied in the 3 zones, there are 109 Teachers and all of them are females. The following table shows the No. of teachers zone wise and percentage wise.

Table 5 – Preschool teachers

Zone	No. of Teachers	Percentage
Batticaloa	44	40.37%
Kalkudah	36	33.03%
Paddiruppu	29	26.60%
Total	109	

This is also shown in the following Pie-chart:

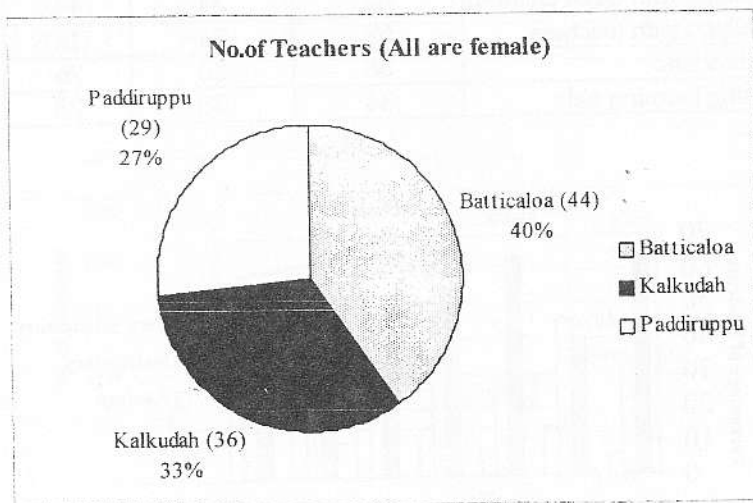


Figure 5: Percentage of teachers in different zones

Distribution of Schools: Teacher wise

The size of the schools, in a way, will determine the extent to which each child benefits from the available resources. At the same time, when there is at least another teacher in a preschool there are several advantages. For example, the teachers can share their experiences and knowledge which in turn will raise

the standard of teaching. In the sample selected for the study, 12% of the schools have only one teacher, 72% of the schools have two teachers and 16% of the school have more than two teachers. The following table shows distribution of schools – Teacher wise.

Table 6 – Teacher wise school distribution

Zone	School with one teacher	Schools with two teachers	Schools with more than two teachers
Batticaloa	03	09	06
Kalkudah	02	13	02
Paddiruppu	01	14	-
Total	06 - (12%)	36 - (72%)	08 - (16%)

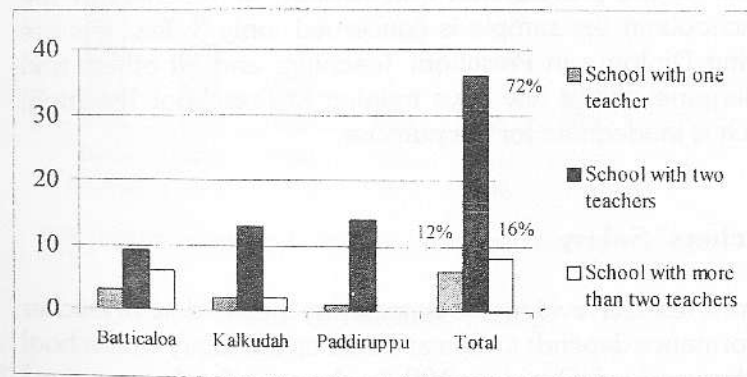


Figure 6: Teacher wise school distribution

Educational and Professional Qualification of Teachers

In the total sample of Teachers, 63% are having G.C.E.(O/L) and 37% of them are having G.C.E.(A/L) as their Educational Qualification. The following Pie-chart shows the Educational Qualifications of Teachers in the sample schools.

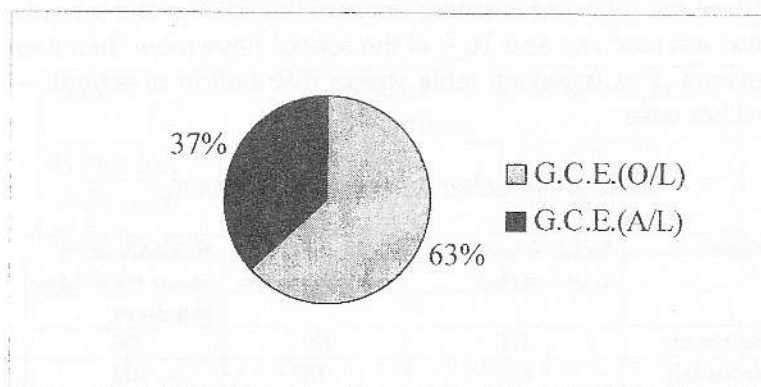


Figure 7: Educational Qualification of teachers

As far as the professional qualification of Teachers in the Preschools in the sample is concerned, only 3 Teachers are having Diploma in Preschool Teaching, and all others had undergone only a few days training in Preschool Teaching, which is inadequate for the purpose.

Teachers' Salary

There is research evidence to suggest that the standard of teacher performance depends to a great extent on the salary a preschool teacher received. Out of the 109 Teachers, 46 Teachers received a salary below Rs.1000/=, and 13 Teachers are working without any payment. Only 3 Teachers who are working in a school in the Batticaloa municipal area are getting a salary of more than Rs.4000/= . The table below indicates the details of the salary they get.

Table 7 - Teachers' Salary

Salary	No. of Teachers	Percentage
Below Rs.1000	46	42.2%
1000-2000	26	23.9%
2000-3000	16	14.7%
3000-4000	05	4.6%
Above 4000	03	2.7%
Without salary	13	11.9%

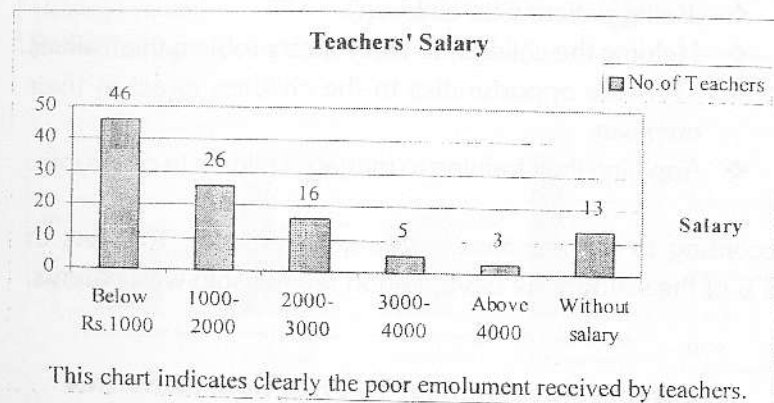


Figure 8: Teachers' Salary

Thus, it is quite clear that concerted effects need to be taken to ensure a higher pay for the preschool teachers.

Teachers' perception of their jobs

The preschool teachers would have chosen this job for various reasons. Also, different teachers would have received the job differently. It is a useful exercise to know about their aspects, because a knowledge of them would help to find ways and means of motivating the teachers towards better professional development.

76% of Teachers expressed that they had chosen Preschool Teaching because they had interest in Preschool education and others said that they had selected because there is no other job for them to select. Most of the Teachers have exhibited the following behaviours satisfactorily:

- ❖ Being pleasant with children
- ❖ Having eye contact with the children
- ❖ Talking to the children to their level
- ❖ Talking to children happily
- ❖ Being patient with children
- ❖ Helping the children to solve their problem themselves
- ❖ Provide opportunities to the children to act in their own way
- ❖ Applying their training to manage children in classroom.

According to the response to the questionnaire, Teachers in 88% of the schools are having good relationship with parents.

Parents' Involvement in Preschool Activities

Information related to parents' involvement in the Preschool was obtained by the questionnaire. Accordingly, parents help the Preschools in collection of funds, being presence at schools, helping in health programmes, making playing materials etc. The following table shows the percentage of schools that received the help. The responses are given in 3 categories – satisfactory, satisfactory to some extent, and not satisfactory. No. of schools are also given with the percentage.

Table 8 – Parents involvement

Relationship type	Satisfactory	Satisfactory to some extent	Not satisfactory
Collection of funds	44% - (22)	40% - (20)	16% - (08%)
Presence to Pre-Schools	58% - (29)	38% - (19)	04% - (04)
Making playing materials etc	38% - (19)	48% - (24)	14% - (07)
Helping in health programme	58% - (29)	34% - (17)	08% - (04)

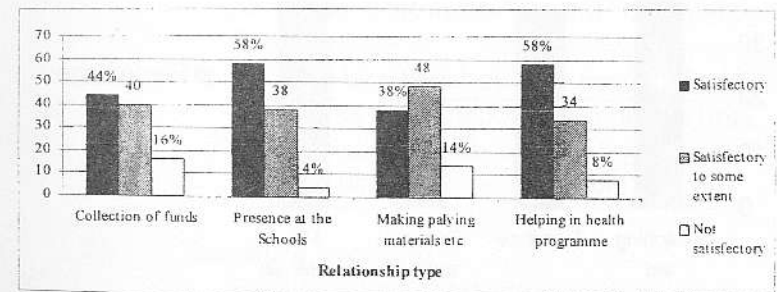


Figure 8: Involvement of Parents

NGO Participation

NGOs in Batticaloa district give support in supplying teaching aid, furniture, financial support and play materials. The number of schools and percentage which receive such support.

Table 9 – NGO participation

Type of support	No. of schools	Percentage
Teaching aid	23	46%
Furniture	18	36%
Financial support	12	24%
Play materials	19	38%

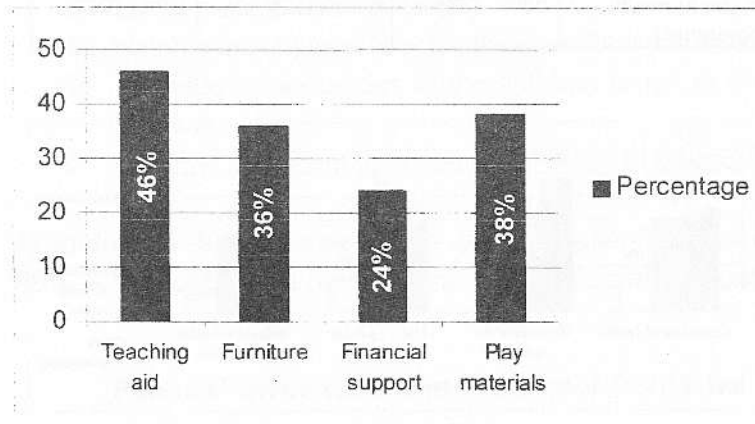


Figure 10: Participation of NGOs

Summary of Problems Identified in the Preschools

Some of the problems identified in the study and the summary is given below

- 1). Problems related to physical facilities
 - Lack of buildings
 - Inadequate furniture
 - Lack of toilet facilities
 - Lack of playing fields

- 2). Problems related to basic facilities
 - Lack of drinking water
 - Lack of health facilities
 - Lack of nutrition
- 3). Problem related to teaching and learning
 - Lack of common curriculum in all Preschools
 - Teachers working without appropriate incentives.

Suggestions

- 1). **Basic facilities**
 - NGOs should be persuaded to provide physical resources to all deserving Preschools.
 - Building facilities should be provided to all Preschools that function in temporary huts.
 - Basic facilities such as toilet rooms and drinking water should be provided
- 2). **Teaching problem**
 - Designing and conducting training courses for Preschool teachers.
 - Planned Preschool supervision should be carried out in all Preschools.
- 3). **Preschools and Community**
 - Organizing and conducting parental awareness programme on the importance of early childhood education.
 - Building up relationship between PSS and community organization

4). **Research and training**

- Studies on various aspects of PSS should be encouraged and findings should be disseminated.
- Providing incentives to researching in ECD and PSS.
- Relevant institution should plan and conduct courses on Preschool education.
- Formation of an umbrella organization with a view of maintaining communication and co-ordination of activities.
- Formation of Preschool education policy.

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