

Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to experimentally test the effect of pre-school education on the development of thought and personal relationships in two selected groups in Sri Lanka, and to see if pre-school children were at an advantageous position when they enter Grade I. The first hypothesis was that pre-school education had no significant effect on the cognitive development of children. The second and third hypotheses were that pre-school education had no significant effects on the emotional adjustment and acceptable social behaviour of children. The fourth hypothesis stated that pre-school education did not facilitate readiness to formal schooling. The fifth hypothesis was that children from affluent homes did not differ significantly from children from non-affluent homes with regard to the benefit they get from pre-school education. (Pre-post designs were utilised to test these hypotheses.) In the pre-test the subjects were administered tests which measured their cognitive development, emotional adjustment, acceptable social behaviour and readiness to formal schooling. The pre-test was administered to the experimental group just as they entered their pre-schools; it was administered to the control group at home.) Forty-one subjects formed the experimental group

and 55 non pre-schoolers formed the control group. The post tests were administered after 8 months, at the beginning of the primary school and at the end of 6 months in a primary school, to both the experimental and control groups. In addition to the pre-school variable, the home environment of the child was studied in relation to socio-economic status, child rearing practices and parent participation.

The analysis tables were divided into two categories; scores representing a direct influence of the experimental method and control method and scores representing the effect of high and low socio-economic status, child rearing practices and parent participation.

There were significant differences between the experimental and control group in relation to cognitive development, acceptable social behaviour, emotional adjustment and readiness to formal schooling, but there were no significant differences between the affluent and the poorer groups in relation to the benefits they got from pre-school education in the areas of cognitive development emotional adjustment and acceptable social behaviour.

The study showed that irrespective of pre-school attendance there were significant differences

between cognitive development scores and the high and low socio-economic status, child rearing practices and parent participation. The study did not show any significant differences between emotional adjustment and high and low scorers in socio-economic status, child rearing practices or parent participation. The study showed significant differences between high and low socio-economic status and acceptable social behaviour and readiness to formal schooling. This study also showed that the home environment variable could not be ignored when pre-school experience was discussed.

The relationships of this study to future investigations and designs were also discussed.