

ABSTRACT

Does ICDS preschool experience make a difference in children's acquisition of developmental skills? Does the difference in Anganwadi preschool programme result in differential influence on children's developmental skills? Do ICDS children continue to be at an advantage at the beginning of first grade, as reflected through their performance on reading readiness and teacher's assessment of their behaviours? To what extent can children's performance (specifically on reading readiness) be attributed to the difference in their home environments? What is the nature of school processes which are likely to affect children's learning? To answer these questions, this study followed children from the age 3 1/2 years upto first grade of primary school.

A sample of 60 children who had undergone non-formal preschool experience of ICDS were compared with 60 children who had no preschool experience. Children's developmental abilities, reading readiness skills and specific school related behaviours were assessed using developmental assessment checklist for preschool children, reading readiness test and teacher's rating of children's behaviours; respectively. The home inventory was used to examine children's home environments and qualitative observations were conducted to study the processes in primary schools.

Results show that ICDS children are significantly ($p < .001$) ahead of children with no preschool experience in their developmental abilities. Findings reveal that Anganwadi programmes that differ on overall global indices do not account

for differential influence on children's development. While the follow up pilot study indicates a trend that programmes which vary widely on specific preschool related features have differential influence on children's developmental abilities.

Furthermore, ICDS children continue to surpass their counterparts with no preschool experience, in the first grade of primary school as is indicated by their significantly ($p < .001$) higher performance on reading readiness and specific school related behaviours. The overall level of home stimulation does not account for significant variation in the scores obtained by children on reading readiness. But language stimulation is seen to be an important feature affecting children's performance on reading readiness. Significant difference ($p < .001$) is noted between children coming from high and low language stimulation homes; with the difference favouring children from high language stimulation homes. Prevalent environment in the primary schools is not favourable for child's learning but the observations highlight the role of teacher in affecting children's learning and development. The implications of the study for intervention programmes, training of personnel, research and evaluation are discussed.