

Current Preschool Education: Are We Expecting More?

Preschool education has undergone a sea change in the last decade with more and more children getting enrolled in formal education at a much younger age. The privatization of education and competition among schools has possibly contributed to this change. In a world of ever increasing competitiveness, it is a proud dream of every parent to make their child literally a 'super hero' who can decimate any competition and emerge as clear winner in all extracurricular activities in addition to academics. Educationists often second the parents' thoughts by striving hard to implement multiple dimensions to the learning process. Most of the schools cash in on this trend by premature introduction of formal instructions, which are usually applicable to children belonging to higher grades with more emphasis on factual knowledge than skill development [1].

Though the dream sounds inspiring, in many cases, it can take a toll on the child's developing psyche at this critical stage of development and can negatively influence their learning outcomes. Studies have shown that there are no academic advantages for children from highly academic environments and on the contrary, there are potential disadvantages in creative expression and emotional well-being of these children [2].

There is no rigid time period to initiate formal education. However, age appropriate developmental capabilities of preschool children should be borne in mind before devising curriculum for them. The usual explanation that 'some children of that age can still do it' is not a justification for expecting the same from all children of same age group. Early demands,

expectations, and peer pressure can have an adverse psychological outcome on children [3].

It is imperative to understand that pre-school children are still at the phase of continuing cognitive development. The rates at which these children learn cannot be generalized. Some may be early starters and some late. Eventually they catch up with their peers, provided they are given encouragement, freedom and time to mature. Subjecting preschool children to an education which is developmentally inappropriate leads to significantly increased stress behaviors when compared with a developmentally appropriate curriculum [4]. This can also predispose these children to psychological problems like performance anxiety, adjustment disorders, school phobia and more importantly specific learning disability. An ideal preschool program should make the child develop skills necessary for later learning rather than making them passive recipients of formal training.

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