Inside four public-funded pre-schools

Excerpts from a Needs Analysis conducted over one academic year

[Note: The identity of the pre-schools, the administrative body and the grant agency has been masked throughout these excerpts to preserve confidentiality.]

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Home Language, School Language

> *The mother tongue or home language of the child will be the primary language of interaction in the ECCE programmes. However, given the young child's ability at this age to learn many languages, exposure to the national/ regional language and English in oral form, as required, will also be explored.*
>
> Draft National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy (2012),
> Section on Ensuring Quality with Equity in ECCE

Proficiency in the school language is a crucial aspect of the foundation that children ought to gain from schooling. We therefore begin with a review of children's home language and school language.

As background information, it is important to note that we found that even when school records showed children's mother tongue as Kannada, this was not always reflective of the child's most used language at home. The discrepancy could have been because parents felt compelled to state Kannada as being the home language perhaps because of socio-linguistic factors. It is possible that parents have a genuine belief that since Kannada exists in the multilingual environments of their homes, stating Kannada as the home language would be a valid claim. Since school records were coloured by such perceptions and socio-linguistic processes, the analysis of children's home language is based on direct interviews with parents and available members at home. In these interviews all the languages at home were noted and the dominant language directed at the child and known by the child was identified.

A further point is about teachers' own proficiency in the school language. A unique challenge can emerge when the teacher uses a dialect not common in the region. The teacher in XXX preschool is an enthusiastic story teller and singer, but has a dialect from North Karnataka (Bijapur/Dharwad). We recorded her reticence to speak much in class or with parents. This could be because she has often been informed that she is not comprehensible. We also recorded that children began to understand her dialect within about five months in school, confirming a well known finding in the academic literature that children can thrive in all forms of linguistic diversity.

Another linguistic characteristic of the teacher community is that for many, Tamil and Telugu is the first language, and their employment in the XXX school network is reflective of the profile of recruitments that occurred prior to the 1990s. All of these teachers are fluent in Kannada, and in the recent past have taken to conducting lessons exclusively in Kannada. Among the new recruits, it is rare to find linguistic diversity. All teachers report their first language as Kannada, with 20% saying they are not proficient in any other language.

Home language, school language dynamics are thus about both children and teachers, and the larger socio-linguistic context within which the pre-schools operate.

Kannada in the pre-school

Teachers in all the pre-schools maintain that the centres are Kannada medium preschools. The children who enrol into these schools come from multiple language backgrounds (see Figure), which is common for pre-schools across India. However what is unique to the

Figure: *Children's first language at home (N = 133)*
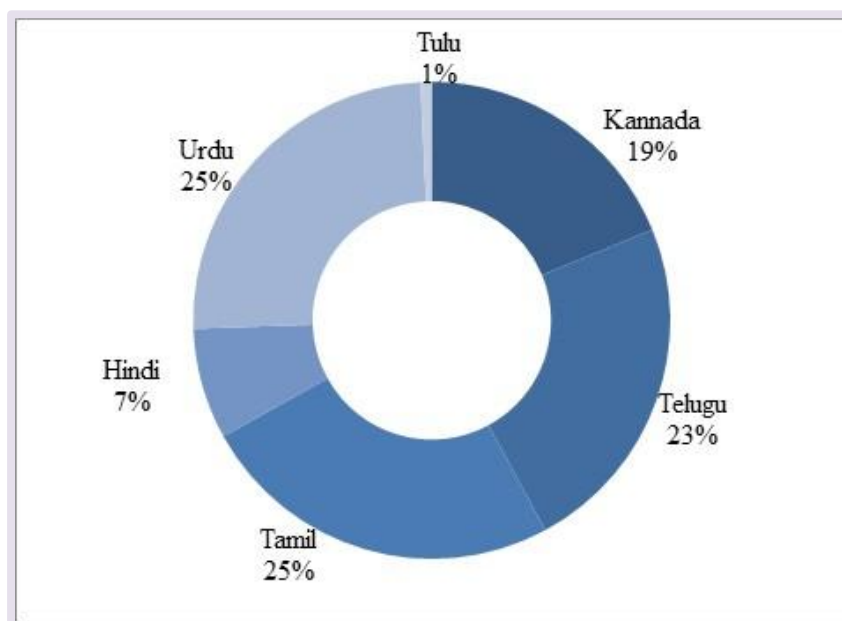
pre-schools in this review is that all four teachers are comfortable only in Kannada. For the first three months of observation (July to September), we found their communications restricted to Kannada instructions such as '*sit quietly*', '*wash your hands*', '*eat quickly*', '*fold your hands*' and '*do not make a noise!*'. These interactions clearly helped children become oriented to simple class routines. On the negative side, there was a stark absence of a relevant language and cognitive stimulation programme.

Systematic language immersion in stories, songs, and interactive activities was not seen. In other words, there was no planned programme to bridge the gap between the child's home language and school language. The learning of Kannada as a second (or third) language for these 3 and 4 year olds was left to random opportunities. It is important to note that the worst

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performing pre-schools appeared to ask for spontaneous comprehension or punitive action ('*I will beat you*!'), placing the child in a helpless, double bind situation.

Teaching of concepts appropriate for 3 to 6 year olds was not seen. One pre-school had repetitive, copywriting sessions. One reason for the sparse teaching-oriented interactions in the pre-school was perhaps because children's potential to learn concepts was always seen through the social-cognitive lens of their Kannada proficiency ("*Leave it. They do not know Kannada, how can they understand a story?*", "*I know learning colours is important. Let them get better in Kannada and then I will begin to teach. I will teach not only colours but also animal names.*").

Teaching-Learning Processes

> *"... promote play based, experiential and child friendly provision for early education and all round development."*
>
> Draft National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy (2012),
> Section on Ensuring Quality with Equity in ECCE

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) as the name implies, has the two components of education and care. As the following sections will demonstrate, teachers in three pre-schools show low knowledge and skills for the delivery of an early childhood education service. These teachers however show minimum levels of mastery required for early childhood care. In contrast, teachers in one pre-school are low in early childhood care but demonstrate greater knowledge and skills for early childhood education. In this pre-school, there is however the burden on the child of a developmentally unsuitable downward extension of the Std. 1 curriculum.

In summary, none of the four centres have a structured ECCE programme that is developmentally appropriate and focussed on the all round development of the child.

Perceptions and Beliefs about Early Childhood Education(ECE)

The perceptions and beliefs of individual teachers across the schools about early childhood education were remarkably similar. Common themes and attitudes noted were as follows:

- ECE for the 3-5 age group does not require thematic content
- ECE does not require hands-on activity (especially for numeracy learning)
- Children in ECE age group are too young for science topics
- Children in ECE are too young for history and geography topics
- Children in ECE are too young for a structured physical activity programme
- Aart, craft and design cannot be started because children just scribble
- Story book reading cannot be started because children cannot read
- Story telling cannot be started because children do not sit quietly and listen
- If children can write neatly then they can read and do number work well: that is what parents want and Std. 1 teachers will expect

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Perceptions about methods of disciplining 3 to 5 year old children were also similar across teachers. Key points noted were:

- 3-5 year olds do not have the ability to monitor themselves and manage their frustrations.
- Asking children to talk in an ECE class will create chaos. Young children anyway cannot say much about anything!
- Children cannot understand discipline (e.g., being quiet, not fighting, not destroying things) if displeasure is communicated only through eyes (e.g., a long look), or words. Physical punishment is essential.
- Children respond well to bribes like chocolates and chips but this cannot be afforded by the pre-school.
- Children learn when there is physical punishment. This should not be 'too much'.
- Children's emotional development is the parent's responsibility. Teacher and pre-school cannot do much in this area.
- Disruptive behaviour is a reflection of poor parenting.
- If a child is too disruptive the best way to manage is to ask the parent to keep the child at home till he or she learns to behave.

Classroom Management and Organisation of the Teaching-Learning Interaction

The timetable in the pre-school at the start of the academic year is given in the Appendix. Activity times were planned in one-hour chunks. From a developmental perspective, this reflects a mismatch for the attention span for 3 to 5 year olds. Among the educational activities, the maximum time was given to copywriting activities and/or repeating after the teacher in a singsong voice (e.g., children in UKG in Lone pre-school repeat numbers 1 to 100, one number at a time). The time allotted for age-appropriate cognitive stimulation, varied across centres (see Appendix). Ironically, teachers demanded accountability for work that was done by children without giving appropriate instructions of what to do, and how to do it, or informing children that help will be provided if anything is not clear. An example is provided in the following observation note:

> A child stands at the elbow of the teacher, as she quickly writes out 1, 2, 3 , 4 in his note book. She calls the numbers out as she writes in and the child watches on. She then points to the whole page and asks him to fill the page. Afterwards, when we point to the patterns on his page, he does not know these number names. He however knows he should copy it at home and return the next day.
>
> *Observation notes, recorded in two pre-schools.*
> *Similar interactions with a slate were noted in a third pre-school.*

Effective teachers make time for organisation, teaching and monitoring of children's learning. An example of good practice based on time profiles of effective teachers is to spend 15% of the school day on organization, management and lesson planning; 50% on interactive teaching and 35% on monitoring children's' work.

In this Needs Analysis, teachers' time-profile in school was remarkably similar as a group, but different from time-profile typically discussed as good practice:

- 15 - 30% of the school day was spent on organization of stocks, basic management, or staying away at teacher desk/room.
- 0 - 5% was spent on lesson planning.
- 25 - 50% was spent on teaching (using recitation and copywriting, rather than interactive sessions).
- 0 - 5% was used to monitor children's work, especially checking home work.
- 25 - 50% was unstructured time appearing not to be linked to teaching-learning targets.

The following were missing or poorly developed in all the pre-schools:

- Clear articulation and formulation of teaching goals.
- Clarity about the sequence of learning tasks.
- Explicit explanations about what children must learn (other than 'ABC' and '123').
- using any form of feedback system to monitor children's progress, especially measures to check children's comprehension of material taught.
- Giving ample time for children to practice skills.
- Using scaffolding methods such as 'prompts' and positive feedback as the child attempts a task.
- Teaching select skills until mastery of them has become automatic.
- Having appropriate expectations from the children for concept learning.

Pre-school functioning

A pre-school depends on skill and knowledge levels of multiple individuals. The two people on the salary rolls for each centre are a teacher and a helper (*ayah*). Observations over six months show as follows:

- Poor coordination between teacher and helper on child care.
- No planning meetings on child care noted.
- Except for one location, the pre-schools work in isolation (i.e., not linked to a primary school or a larger teacher network).
- The links with the relevant government agency and teacher networks is administrative and not about professional development.
- Minimal skills and capacity in the teacher and ayah for monitoring and evaluation of pre-school functioning.
- Other monitoring and evaluation systems found to be for administrative matters, ad hoc and sometimes even contradictory (e.g., from the relevant government agency or school head of the primary school).

The following tables present specific details.

Review of pre-school functioning against the stated timetable of activities

Information as shared with the Needs Analysis team in June, 2014				
Pre-school identifier	**Pre-school 1**	**Pre-school 2**	**Pre-school 3**	**Pre-school 4**
Grouping of 3 - 5 year olds	Single group	Single group	Two groups LKG / UKG	Single group
Class Timings	9.30 am to 3 pm	9.30 to 2.30	9 am to 3 pm	10 am to 3 pm
Teaching-learning materials	Charts, soft toys, notebooks	Charts, notebooks	Charts, notebooks	Charts, soft toys, slate
Parent meetings	Rare, mainly when there is a disciplinary or health issue	Unclear	Rare, mainly when there is a disciplinary or health issue	Rare, mainly when there is a disciplinary or health issue
Use of punishment	No	No	No	No
Frequently observed by the Needs Analysis team between July and December, 2014				
Working day Teacher timings Class timings	9.40 – 3 10 – 2.30	9.45 – 3 10 - 3 Teacher often on leave	9.20 – 3.30 10 – 2.30	10 – 2.30 10 – 2.30 Teacher often on leave
Grouping of 3 - 5 year olds	No multi-ability grouping or differentiated teaching	No multi-ability grouping or differentiated teaching	LKG and UKG have *similar* mixed age groups (i.e., LKG is not always for the younger children), there is no multi-ability grouping or differentiated teaching	No multi-ability grouping or differentiated teaching
Teaching-learning materials	Use of materials is average. Children are not given clear instructions. Keen to introduce teaching-learning materials but feels unskilled to use manipulatives, or conduct storytelling and interactive sessions. Responds to a step by step briefing for a lesson.	Use of materials is adequate. Children are not given clear instructions. Keen to introduce teaching-learning materials and variety in activities but unclear of the skills required. Responds to a step by step briefing for a lesson.	Use of materials is average. The only hands-on work is with copywriting. Instructions are always for the group. Keen to introduce teaching-learning materials but sceptical about use of manipulatives, storytelling and interactive sessions. Both teachers respond to a step by step briefing for a lesson.	Use of materials is random. Poor instruction giving. Half-hearted about new materials ad activities. Does not prepare in advance. Often forgets activity routines if not used for a day.

Review of pre-school functioning against the stated timetable of activities (cont'd)

Pre-school identifier	Pre-school 1	Pre-school 2	Pre-school 3		Pre-school 4
Grouping of 3 - 5 year olds	Single group	Single group	Two groups		Single group
			LKG	UKG	
Frequently observed by the Needs Analysis team between July and December, 2014					
Parent meetings	Rapport with parents low, but keen to draw them in. No group meetings spontaneously called by teacher. Interaction with parents at start or end of day is functional and never about teaching-learning process.	Rapport with parents low, hesitant to draw them in. Interaction with parents at start or end of day is functional and never about teaching-learning process.	Rapport with parents low, hesitant to draw them in. No group meetings spontaneously called by teacher. Interaction with parents is functional and mainly about home-work (usually initiated by parents demanding daily home-work).		Rapport with parents low, hesitant to draw them in. No group meetings spontaneously called by teacher. Interaction with parents functional and mainly focussed on what time they will return to pick up the child and what they have packed for the child's snacks/ lunch.
Use of Punishment	Mild forms of physical punishment seen *(pinching child, rough language)*. More by support staff than teacher.	Physical punishment seen *(use of cane, hitting on head, pushing, rough language)*. This is by the support staff and not the teacher.	High frequency of physical punishment seen *(use of cane, boxing ears, pinching child, beating, hitting on head, pushing, rough and taunting language)*. This is high frequency and from support staff, teacher and HM.		Physical punishment seen *(boxing ears, pushing, rough language)*. More by support staff than teacher.

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Appendix: Review of teaching-learning processes against the stated timetable of activities.[1]

	Timetable shared with the Needs Analysis team in June, 2014				
School name	**Pre-school 1**	**Pre-school 2**	**Pre-school 3**		**Pre-school 4**
			LKG	**UKG**	
9.00 - 9.30	Prayer	No timetable	Play	Play	
9.30 - 10					
10.00 - 10.30			Oral teaching	Oral reading	Prayer
10.30 - 11	Writing				Play
11.00 - 11.30			Writing		Charts
11.30 - 12.00				Writing	Writing
12.00 - 12.30	Lunch		Lunch (12.10 to 1)		Lunch
12.30 - 1.00					
1.00 - 1.30	Oral activities		Rhymes (45 min.) + Writing	Yoga (15 min.) + Tables	Writing & Sleep
1.30 - 2.00					
2.00 - 2.30	Play		Rhymes + Story	Story	Rhymes
2.30 - 3.00					
	Frequently observed class transactions by the Needs Analysis team between July and November, 2014				
Nature of play	few toys but no initiation into their use, usually unsupervised. After lunch children are ready to leave	few toys but no initiation into their use, no games, no drill or physical exercise, teacher sees period as non-teaching time	Some exercise and free play in the school ground but little variety in activity, few toys but no initiation into their use, teacher sees period as non-teaching time		few toys but no initiation into their use, some unsupervised free play, after lunch it is forced sleep time

[1] All activities are important for cognitive and social-emotional development. In addition, cells in blue refer to activities that support visuo-motor development, in pink support language development and in white support motor development.

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			Pre-school 3		
School name	**Pre-school 1**	**Pre-school 2**	**LKG**	**UKG**	**Pre-school 4**
Nature of oral activities	short burst of Kannada singing and rhymes, sing-song repetition of akshara and letters, picture naming from charts (placed too high to be clear to children). No storytelling, no dialogue, no 'show and tell' by children.	some Kannada and English rhymes, brief time on singsong repetition of akshara, picture naming from charts (placed too high to be clear to children). No storytelling, singing, no dialogue, no 'show and tell' by children.	some Kannada and English rhymes, few songs, brief time on singsong repetition of akshara, picture naming from charts (placed too high to be clear to children). No storytelling, no dialogue, no 'show and tell' by children.	compared to LKG, there are more rhymes, singsong recitation (e.g., 1 – 100), picture naming. Some singing. No storytelling, no dialogue, no asking children to narrate their experiences.	brief time on singsong repetition of akshara, picture naming from charts (placed too high to be clear to children). Three English rhymes. No storytelling, singing, no dialogue, no 'show and tell' by children.
Nature of written work	Some copywriting, no instruction to support transition from scribbling to colourings to copywriting. No activities to develop visuo-motor skills.		Disproportionate amount of time on copywriting. No instruction to support transition from scribbling to colouring to copywriting. No activities to develop visuo-motor skills.		Unsupervised 'colouring'. Copywriting on slate for visuo-motor development.

Frequently observed class transactions by the Needs Analysis team between July and November, 2014

Note: All activities are important for cognitive and social-emotional development. In addition, cells in blue refer to activities that support visuo-motor development, in pink support language development and in white support motor development.

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