



**Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Pakistan:
Perceptions of Practitioners**

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Abstract

The major aim of the study is to explore the effect of present law and order situation of Karachi on academic performance. This study was designed to evaluate the impact of present deteriorating situation on teaching-learning process and on academic achievement. The target population of the study comprised of all head teachers of Government and Private Secondary Schools in Karachi. However, sample of the study was comprised of head teachers (Headmasters/Headmistresses) of 40 head teachers of Government Secondary Schools and private secondary schools located in Karachi. The instruments of data collection (questionnaires) was developed and validated. The data was collected through personal visits. The analysis was made by using SPSS. The major findings of the study were irregular teaching-learning experience during present law and order situation, lack of government efforts for peace keeping, leadership at all levels (political/local) is not working in the city with harmony, law enforcement agencies are proactive to secure the people's daily life activities, media is communicating information to public with true text and context, community is addressing its public issues during 'fragile situation', parents and teachers are not satisfied with the academic performance of the students in the present law and order situation so the recommendation is that peaceful environment is necessary for continuous teaching-learning experience and better educational performance.

Keywords: Academic performance, Peaceful environment, Law and order situation, Stakeholders, Rule of law.

JEL Classification: A20, A21

Introduction

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is an approach to early years teaching which is designed to ensure optimum learning and development for young children. DAP framework structures the learning in a way that facilitates children's learning potential, age, culture and interest. It caters to the holistic development of the young children with a basic philosophy of valuing childhood. The concept of DAP was originated and initiated by National Association of Education of Young Children position statement (NAEYC, 1991).

DAP is used in various countries and is found to be effective in various early years education centers. In Pakistan, there are very few institutions which are following DAP approach of early year's education and there is dearth of literature and published studies that explore the benefits and challenges attached to using DAP in Pakistan. Hence, the aim of this investigation was deliberated to explore the perceptions of practitioners related to developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in early year's educational settings. Two main research questions were aimed for this inquiry; i.e. a) what are the perceptions of the practitioners about using DAP in early childhood settings and b) what are the advantages and challenges in following this approach. Since, this study was planned as a small undergraduate class research project study the main purpose was to pilot the study in a very small sample to its applicability in the practical context.

Literature Review

Developmentally appropriate practices offer wide range of active learning strategies to create stimulating and interactive environment for the young learners in the classroom. There are three core principles on which the DAP framework revolves, which is to safeguard and guarantee that whatsoever curriculum and learning is planned and delivered has to be individually appropriate, developmentally appropriate, and culturally important. The component of developmental appropriateness comes with considering the developmental

health milestones and characteristics of young children (Mallory & New, 1994) and also with acknowledging 12 principles of child development. These 12 principles sanctions the core principle of learning via play, learning that is interconnected, environment that is conducive, caregiver who is fully trained, that children learn (King, 1993) with their own pace and that every child demonstrated the outcome of learning differently. The second core component of DAP that is individually appropriateness element which demands the learning to be designed (Rushton & Larkin, 2001), delivered and assessed considering each child's learning ability and interest. The third core component of DAP of culturally significant learning is to consider the factors of making learning meaningful, relevant and practical for children which would serve them as a tool for contributing in the communities and settings where children are based.

DAP is one of the most recognized and implanted approaches of early years education. There have been several researches conducted to assess the impact of DAP on children outcomes and also to explore advantages and challenges attached with using this approach.

Several initiations have been taken to assess the impact of DAP and teachers perceptions of using DAP approach one of which was a study conducted Charlsworth, Hart, Burts and Sue (1991) that developed a questionnaire to explore the beliefs of the teachers which appeared to be a useful tool for the same.

A study conducted by Parker, Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) explored factors shaping teacher beliefs in DAP classrooms. A sample of 34 teachers were taken for the study and the data revealed that teachers involved in using DAP face difficulty in coordinating with teachers who don't have any knowledge of DAP. Moreover, the data revealed that using DAP even to a limited extent turns classrooms into more child friendly classrooms and provides autonomy to the learners.

Jipson (1991) explored the implications of using DAP and explored that it provides great capacity to the teachers to respond to cultural diversity. However, it fails to recognize the flexibility and interconnectedness of culture, teaching and learning. McMullen (1997) in a study explored the teachers beliefs of using DAP and have explored that DAP helps the teachers to understand the children more closely. It also gives room for to the teachers to take each child on their own pace. Whereas, that data also revealed that implementing DAP becomes tedious task for the teachers and their workload increases.

Another study was conducted by Oakes and Caruso (1990) that explored the relationship between kindergarten teacher use of DAP and their authority in the class as a teacher. The study revealed that the teachers who rates themselves as authoritative were found using DAP more likely than the ones who take forward a multiple ways of teaching. Another study by Dickinson (2002) projected teachers facing difficulties in assessing children under DAP approach.

Considering the various aspects attached to DAP implementation the purpose of this study was determine to explore the perceptions of practitioners pertinent to using DAP in early years classrooms.

Research Methodology

Design

Qualitative phenomenology design was chosen for this study. This design was found most appropriate for the study because the researcher aimed at exploring the perceptions of the key stakeholders who are using DAP approach in their settings. Phenomenology design helps understand the phenomenon and lived experiences of the people in context.

Participants

The participants of the study were chosen using nonrandom purposive sampling and three teachers and two teacher helpers from two schools using DAP curriculum were chosen.

They were chosen by an inclusion criteria that aimed at selecting the participants who would be willing to participate in the study, have knowledge of DAP and have used the DAP in their own classroom settings.

Measures

Semi structured interview guides were developed to collect the data. Open ended questions along with probes were prepared to provide enough room to the participants to share their experiences pertinent to the phenomenon.

Research Consideration

Thematic analysis was done manually. The data was first transcribed and then themes were extracted.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was taken from all the participants by sharing with them the confidentiality and anonymity element which was considered for the data. Moreover, their right of withdrawal and refusal from any point of time from the study was also shared with them.

Research Findings and Discussion

Two major themes emerged from the data

- a) The benefits of using DAP
- b) Limitations and challenges.

Benefits of Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Teachers have found DAP to be a child centered approach. A few teachers have mentioned that DAP provides autonomy to a child to plan their own learning with their own pace. One of the teachers mentioned “children are asked daily what they would like to study, how would they like to go in the corner, what would they want to do”. Another teacher mentioned, “Children sometimes when they don’t feel like doing writing work go to learning

area corner and play with whatever materials they wish to". These perceptions are in line of literature since the DAP (Bredekamp, 1986) approach is designed to cater to the individual needs. Teachers do experience this shift in methodological change specially in context like Pakistan, where the teaching mode is often traditional in scope and all the students are seen at same length.

Teachers treasured DAP to be respecting the individuality since the DAP framework has the core component to cater to the individual needs of each and every child. To this one of the teachers mentioned, "I can take care of all the needs of children of each child and there is no pressure on me to take a standardize approach". Another teacher mentioned that, "children don't have any pressure to be like other children they can be themselves". To this one of the helper teachers said, "I make plans for slow learners and worksheets for gifted students. This helps us to ensure that children who are fast paced learners get extra learning and children who are slow in their work get extra help". DAP approach has wide range of hands on skills to allow students to practice literacy and language in context (Neuman, Copple, Bredekamp, 2000)

Limitation and Challenges attached with DAP implementation

Teachers found the implementation of DAP approach to be time and resource constrained. To this one of the senior teacher mentioned, " It requires a lot of resources to manage and establish the classrooms and procedures. It also requires expertise of nurses, doctors and integrated teaching staff because we can't take care of the nutritional needs". DAP is an approach that requires teachers to plan learning with play based strategies and materials. Teachers are required to spend time and money in developing learning resources for the children. Likewise the supplementary materials of DAP are very costly (Mallory & New, 1994).

Practitioners also found that not much awareness is established in Pakistani context pertinent to DAP. To this one of the helpers mentioned, “DAP practices itself are too ideal to be implemented in the setting which caters to the low privilege children”. Another lead teacher mentioned, “The awareness amongst the general public is also another hindering factor and challenge that can be faced”. There is not enough literature published in Pakistani context about DAP. Moreover, the DAP approach is not very widely used approach in Pakistan. Hence, the awareness pertinent to same is somewhat limited.

Another issue that is mentioned by the teachers was the technicality of DAP. To this one of the senior teachers mentioned, “Trained qualified people having the training of DAP are not much in quantity and dissemination of the idea behind DAP thus cannot be transformed into the action. The setting for individualized teaching is not build in the Pakistani classrooms that could support the DAP theory”. This can also be found to be in place with other studies being carried out that explore the teacher beliefs and problems attached to DAP approach (Goldstein, 1997; Shepard, 1994). DAP requires a trained and well qualified teachers who should be in-charge of teaching and learning which requires a teacher to go through intensive training and development. This may not be found in Pakistan since according to the records there are no such evidences of official DAP certifies teachers found in the web data base.

Another teacher mentioned, “The quality of professionals and services of early child care is not in condition to develop child friendly profiles because of deficiency of material and human resources. DAP does not provide any training support manual for the practitioners’ to adapt the theory into the practice”.

Another teacher mentioned, “DAP is also a wide range of theoretical strategies and does not give any format, structures and plans for varied setting. DAP does also not recommends a plan that allow all the early childhood field practitioners to come under one

platform and plan out an action plan for DAP implementation. DAP is an approach and hence framework and implementation action plan is yet to be devised by the individuals as per their context”.

Developmentally appropriate practice requires well-trained, highly qualified and experienced teachers with an enabling environment specially prepared for young children and resources that provoke sensory stimulation. Moreover, it requires a well-planned, flexible, enriching and interactive curriculum. Hence, there is a need for greater understanding, further professional training and updating resource bank with latest DAP resources in Pakistan (Carta, Schwartz, Atwater & McConnell, 1991; Dun, 1997; Gestwicki, 2013; Jones, Burts, Buchanan & Jambunathan, 2000).

Conclusion

DAP is found to be one of the most effective approaches of teaching and learning in early childhood education. However, there is a need for the agency to disseminate training and resources pertinent to it to the developing countries on a lesser financial implications so to make it convenient for them to explore the advantages of DAP conveniently. In addition to it, DAP requires the practitioner to be fully skilled and trained, with limited or no training neither its usefulness cannot be measured nor can the level of teacher involvement.

This study was a part of a small practice research project in an undergraduate diploma where the researcher was not well equipped with rigorous research skills for investigation and hence faced several other challenges. One of the major challenge faced was the lack of supervisory facilitation, since in Pakistan very few people have done any professional training on DAP. The other challenge was search for literature, not many studies have been done and published in Pakistani context related to DAP and so it became very difficult to look for local literature and on the other hand the access of literature from other countries was very limited. Another limitation was time, where the researcher was required to finish the

project within 3-4 weeks which did not allow the researcher to study the phenomenon in depth.

Further Research

- How do developmentally appropriate practices can work in low economic setting of Pakistani schools?
- What are the pre training requisites for an ECD teacher who will be opting for DAP?
- What is the environment setting for effective DAP implementation?
- How does DAP effect/contribute the/to healthy child development?

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