All development comes about through the interaction of organism and environment. Activity in response to environmental stimulation is an outcome of such interaction. Since changes in the level of one’s functioning is basically a matter of responding to the stimuli, internal and external, that impinge upon one’s sense receptors, the vital importance of stimulation, its quality and appropriateness as well as its adequacy becomes already apparent. A large number of children in preschool years growing up in developing countries seem to suffer a handicap in the form of a poor or impoverished environmental facility.

Environment is the major source of stimuli that either control or regulate behaviour. But the quality and amount of stimulation received by children in different environments vary greatly. The stimulation received especially during the preschool period will create a long lasting impact on later personality development, since this is the crucial period in every individual's life which has to be carved and moulded properly.
1.1 Background of the problem

During the early childhood period, significant changes occur in the child in all the areas of development namely physical, social, emotional and intellectual areas. His cognitive development also expands during the period. He has increasingly larger vocabulary and more sophisticated language skills (Hurlock, 1973). Since any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest way to any child at any stage of development, a carefully planned, well placed early education programme can give children the experiences they need for their cognitive development.

Learning is a complex process and the impulse to learn flows naturally from a child's curiosity about the world around him and from his desire to gain mastery over himself and his environment. The learning is fed by his steadily growing understanding of language and his interest in the magical power of words. In the classroom, the child is actively engaged in exploring the environment and learning about the world and society around him. He is motivated by his own curiosity. Moreover he learns by active exploration and by involving himself in the process of development.

Autonomy flourishes as children explore a world outside the home and choose from among many activities tailored to their interest and abilities which let them experience many success that build confidence and self image. As mentioned by Papalia and Olds (1994), preschool is particularly vulnerable in helping children from one or two child families learn how to
get along with other children.

Children enter school with a broad range of home backgrounds. These include the fortunate youngster who has his own books, parents who read to him and a wealth of enriching experiences as well as the child who has never seen any one read a book for enjoyment. The class room teacher has a responsibility for capturing and stimulating the interest of children in reading regardless of their home environments.

Favourable cognitive development and social development have been associated with predictability and regularity of home environments, that is with homes where things have their time and place where meals, bedtimes and other routines are regular and where the child has a place for her belongings, a safe place in which to play and a quiet place to study.

In the view of Stott (1974), a very bright and active preschool child in one sort of home situation with a particular set of parents, might become an effective and responsible school leader. The same child had been born into a very different family environment could become a domineering, hostile and emotionally disturbed person. The direction and extent of learning is a matter of great importance in relation to an individual’s emotional adjustment and his total personality development. General adequacy of functioning in life is very largely a matter of learning in this broad sense.

The environmental influence may modify the expression of
temperament. A child with an initial pattern characterised by frequent negative reactions may shift to a more frequent expression of positive mood, if his life experiences are benign and favourable. A very adaptable child who is repeatedly faced with impossible demands and expectations may after a time become increasingly less adaptable in his behaviour.

The temperament of many children change over the course of the preschool years and this seems in part to be attributable to the responses of parents.

Thus a child is not an inert and malleable mass to be shaped by the environment, nor is he a rigid structure whose characteristics are fixed and unchangeable over time.

1.2 Scope of the study

The first five years of life are important for emotional, intellectual and social development. This is a time when a child is developing more rapidly and is learning more than at any other time in his life. Children are more resilient and adaptable than previously thought and the development is a continuous interaction between a child’s genetic make up and his constantly changing environment.

The environmental influences may modify the expression of temperament. The temperament of many children change over the course of preschool years and this seems in part to be attributable to the responses
of parents (Beckwith, 1979). The unspoiled nature of the child is free, spontaneous and creative. Each child is a unique individual like no other and is want to behave in relation to his surroundings in his own unique way. Hence the atmosphere of the school room in which the child finds himself is very important.

The arena of the impact of environmental stimulation on preschool children is still groping in the dark, conspicuous by the absence of any detailed study and research and even the average educated parents being unaware of the implications. The preschool stage, by all means the crucial period in early individuals's life is to be carved and moulded properly, even slight stimulations creating a long lasting impact on the future personality development. A scientific study based on environmental stimulations as a whole taking into consideration the home and school atmosphere, by means of proper facilities available, will be worth while. It will bring to lime light the more intricate problems in the field, thus enabling the parents and teachers to deal with their children in a proper and tactful way, thereby carving out healthy (both mentally and physically) individuals.

1.3 Aim

The aim of the study is to find out the influence of environmental stimulation on the temperament and learning ability of preschool children.

1.4 Objectives

The main objectives of the present investigation are as follows.
To find out the influence of home environment in the areas of
(a) Temperament
(b) Learning ability

To find out the influence of school environment in the areas of
(a) Temperament
(b) Learning ability

1.5 Concepts used

1.5.1 Environmental Stimulation

Devi (1998) defines environmental stimulation as both physical and non-physical stimuli available in the immediate surroundings in which the child lives and grows. In the present study, the term environmental stimulation means the stimulation given to the children in both the home and school environment. In the home environment, the stimulation given through exposure to objects and media, verbal and psychological interaction between parents and children and the time spent quantitative and qualitative in nature together by parents and children are considered. In the school, variety of stimulation given including the availability of equipment (toys and educational materials), time allotment for individual and group activities, teacher - pupil interaction and teaching methods have been considered.
1.5.2 Temperament

Buss and Plomin (1975) have given four dimensions of temperament (1) activity (2) emotionality (3) sociability and (4) impulsivity.

In the present study, activity, emotionality and sociability are considered under temperament.

1.5.3 Learning ability

Watkins et al (1992) defines learning ability as the ability in which an individual can learn a particular behaviour. In the present study, readiness to perform activities related to reading and writing are considered under learning ability.

1.5.4 Preschool children

Preschool children in the study include both boys and girls of five years of age and who are attending upper kindergarten.

1.6 Hypothesis

The hypothesis formulated for the present study are as follows.

1.6.1 The home environment will influence the preschool children with regard to

(a) Temperament
(b) Learning ability
1.6.2 The school environment will influence the preschool children with regard to

(a) Temperament
(b) Learning ability

1.6.1.1 Exposure to objects and media will influence the preschool children with regard to

(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability

1.6.1.2 Verbal interaction will influence the preschool children with regard to

(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability

1.6.1.3 Psychological interaction between the parents and children will influence the preschool children with regard to

(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability
1.6.1.4 Time spent (quantitative) together with parents and children will influence the preschool children with regard to

(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability

1.6.1.5 Time spent (qualitative) together with parents and children will influence the preschool children with regard to

(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability

1.6.2.1 Availability of equipment in the school will influence the preschool children with regard to

(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability

1.6.2.2 Time allotment for individual activities will influence the preschool children with regard to

(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability
1.6.2.3 Time allotment for group activities will influence the preschool children with regard to
(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability

1.6.2.4 Teacher - pupil interaction will influence the preschool children with regard to
(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability

1.6.2.5 Teaching methods will influence the preschool children with regard to
(a) Activity
(b) Emotionality
(c) Sociability
(d) Learning ability

1.6.3 There will be significant difference among preschool children between Trivandrum, Kozhikode and Thrissur districts with regard to
(a) Home environment
(b) School environment
(c) Temperament and
(d) Learning ability