CHAPTER-V

GENERALISATIONS
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Generalised view of the situation prevailing in the field of preschools of urban India is presented in this chapter.

5.1 Introduction

The data collected has been critically discussed in the previous chapter. From the foregoing discussion generalisations were made. This generated a comprehensive idea regarding the scenario existing in the field of preschool education in urban India. For the shortcomings pointed out, remedies have been suggested. The generalisations regarding administration, infrastructure and curriculum of the preschools have been presented separately.

5.2 GENERALISATIONS REGARDING THE ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES OF THE PRESCHOOLS

Generalisations regarding the administrative issues of the preschools are presented below.

Student strength of the preschools:

The preschools varied greatly regarding the number of students on their roll. On one end was a school with 340 students and on the other end was a school with as few as 25 students.
Grades (Classes) of the nursery schools and the age required for admission into them:

The pattern of grading or classes varied in the nursery schools. Some had three grades - prenursery, nursery or lower kindergarten (LKG) and upper kindergarten (UKG). Some had only the first two grades, prenursery and LKG while some had only the first grade, prenursery. The government nursery school had the second two grades LKG and UKG. The terms KG (Kindergarten) and nursery were used synonymously in the nursery schools.

Thus unlike the schools of our country, which usually conform to the 10+2 pattern of grading, no such uniformity existed in the field of nursery schools. This can be attributed to the absence of well defined regulations in this field from any statutory body.

The minimum age required for admission into the prenursery class was 2 ½ years, that for nursery/LKG was 3 ½ years, while that for UKG was 4 ½ years.

Educationists like Comenius and Rousseau had expressed that formal education should start from later infancy (5-6 years). Froebel, the father of preschool movement started the first kindergarten for 4-6 years olds. Montessori included children who were 3-7 years old in her preschool programmes. Children in this age group were considered to be eligible for preschool education by Indian educationists like Mahatma Gandhi and
Gijubhai Bedheka. Even the government preschools are meant for children not less than 3 years. But the private preschools irrespective of their grading pattern have lowered the age for imparting formal education. For the two years old children with working mothers, at the most custodial care may be provided but not formal education.

Goals of the preschools:

The recommendations of various education commissions regarding the goals of the preschools have been mentioned on page no.271. They can be summed up by saying that development of balanced personality, right attitudes, independence and the ability of self expression in children should be the goals of a nursery school. This is the view reflected in the guidelines provided by various authors like Green M. and Woods (1954), Foster and Headley (1959), Bettelheim and Takanishi (1976). From the study of the goals of the preschools it was observed that the development of balanced personality in the children was a goal, common to all the preschools. This was in keeping with the recommendations mentioned above.

Another goal common only to the private preschools was the preparation of foundation for future schooling. If it had implied social and emotional development with the development of readiness for reading and writing, it would have been in accordance with the recommendations regarding the objectives of a preschool. But it does
not imply preparation for future schooling to be the natural outcome of pre schooling. It is more a preparation for future admission test to be held by the schools. Today it has become a much sought after target of the private preschools. Their time table and the curriculum fully support this assumption.

**Teacher -Student Ratio :**

The *UNESCO* report of 1961 said that the maximum number of students under the care of a teacher should be twenty five. *Gans Roma and Stendler* (1952) said that a teacher should not deal with more than 6, two years old children at a time *Rudolph M.* (1954) said that the teacher should try to reach out to every child and speak to him personally. For this a low teacher-student ratio is needed. *Cohen and Rudolph* (1977) said that individual differences are greatest among children of preschool stage. Every child has his unique needs. Unlike in a school with preschool experience acting as a leveler for the widely different backgrounds, in a preschool there is no such leveler. According to the report of the *International Commission of Education* (1976) to the UNESCO, preschool experience can level off differences among children from varying socio-economic backgrounds. Children from the underprivileged families often find it difficult to cope up with the social and cognitive demands of the school. But preschool experience help in fulfilling such demands and thus act as a leveler. Therefore unlike school children, in a preschool, children do not have any such leveling experience as
they step out of different types of backgrounds. Hence in a preschool the need for individual attention is much greater. This can be possible only if the teacher-student ratio is low. Montessori too was strongly opposed to treating children as a group and insisted that in a nursery school every child deserves individual attention.

In the nursery schools studied for this research nowhere was the teacher-student ratio less than 1:25. Overcrowding in government preschools may be due to the limited number of seats in comparison to the number of applicants. But in private preschools the reason was altogether different. Every child admitted was a potential source of income. This is because in the absence of any grants, the chief source of income was the fees paid by the students.

The solution to the problem of overcrowding lies in the formation of a statutory body to aid and supervise the private preschools.

**Finance**

The report from [UNESCO](https://www.unesco.org) in 1961 had recommended government aid for private nursery schools. In India private educational institutions are eligible for aid but this facility has not been extended to the private nursery schools.

In the absence of any aids for private preschools the fees paid by the students and the commissions paid by the shops
determined by the schools for the purchase of books, uniforms, etc. were the chief sources of income. Hence tuitions fees and annual charges were high and the parents complained that the shops fixed by the schools charged more than the market price. Only one of the nursery schools received books instead of money from the shop fixed by it. Hence the parents were at the receiving end.

The teachers of all the private preschools received poor salary. This was inspite of the recommendations of the UNESCO in 1961 that teachers of preschools should be paid well. The schools recruited fewer teachers but admitted more children and this resulted in overcrowded classrooms.

If liberal grants and regular supervision are available for private preschools the above mentioned problem can be solved. Strict supervision will ensure that preschools are not opened merely to serve as financially profitable enterprises.

**Recruitment of teachers**

Kher Committee (1934), Sargent Commission (1944), the report of the UNESCO (1961), Kothari Commission (1964-66), Programme of Action (1986) and authors like Foster and Headley (1959) had stressed the need for teachers with the proper qualification and training for nursery schools.
Teaching is a specialised service that requires special knowledge and skills. Only trained personnel can do justice to the job. But the private preschools showed laxity in this respect. Most of the teachers lacked the training to teach. Some of the trained teachers were trained to teach in secondary schools.

Supervision by a statutory body can ensure that the persons with proper qualification and training are recruited.

**Decision making**

It is said that the philosophy of education depends on the political situation of the country. In a democracy the institutions are expected to function democratically. Therefore it is expected that the management of nursery schools too will include the teachers in the decision making process. This develops dedication towards the organisation. An environment with greater freedom nurtures creativity. Modern experts of organisational management like Leavitt, Maslow, Mary Follett and others have advocated the need to provide the workers with the opportunity for self actualisation.

In the preschools the teachers had say in the matters regarding the curriculum but in most of them they had only a passive role in matters pertaining to the administration. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for self
actualisation is at the top. But this was realised in only one of the preschools.

It is true that schools have the right to exclude parents from the decision making process but if they are at least open to the views of the parents then it can help in developing link between the school and home and enrich the source of ideas. This was practised by only one preschool. Hence for the growth of the organisation the teachers should be included in the decision making process. The parents too should have the freedom to voice their opinion.

**Working days and working hours**

The private preschools had five while the government preschool had six working days. All of them had 3-4 hours schedule which is in keeping with the time recommended by authors like *Foster and Headley* (1959), *Hammonds et. al.* (1963), *Rao and Islam* (1977).

**School Transport**

Most of the children of the nursery schools traveled by rickshaws through busy roads. Such a mode of conveyance was less safe than a bus or a van. However the choice of the transport was solely that of the parents. The schools only ensured that the children alighted from and boarded the transport properly.
School Uniform

Children in colourful attires make the environment of a nursery school informal. But this is outweighed by the advantages of wearing uniforms. Uniforms introduce children to a disciplined life and do away with the disparity caused by rich and ordinary dresses. The fact that the children from preschool stage wear uniforms is appreciable.

For the private preschools uniforms have another advantage. The shops fixed by the schools provide them with monetary benefit.

Maintenance of Discipline

Green M. (1954) equated discipline in a nursery school to order in a group. The ancient belief was- spare the rod and spoil the child. Hence corporal punishment was deemed to be essential for disciplining a child. Rousseau advocated that the child should learn through the natural consequences of his actions. However a child is impulsive by nature and leaving him to learn from the consequences of his actions may be dangerous. Educationists like Vivekananda, Gandhi, Montessori, Dewey and others have advocated the need for self discipline. Gandhiji was totally against corporal punishment. Montessori felt that the environment of a preschool should be rich with activities. If a
child has enough scope for creative activities he shall be fruitfully busy.

The timetable too has a role to play in maintaining discipline. Rest and recreation should alternate periods of formal activities to avoid fatigue and hence irritable behaviour. Heron A. (1979) and Gloysis M. (1991) found that high teacher-student ratio induces aggressiveness and poor academic achievement in preschoolers.

In most of the preschools studied, corporal punishment was rarely used. Threats of punishment, rebukes and deprivation from rewards were used to maintain discipline. Although these were also negative methods but teachers, over burdened with too many children tend to lose their temper and become irritable. In few of the preschools physical punishment was meted out. This had a quick but temporary effect in stopping errant behaviour. But it may develop permanent phobia for a subject or even education.

Cohen H.D. and Rudolph M. (1977) said that neither license (extensive permissiveness) nor excessive punishment are conducive for terminating errant behaviour. Acts like use of foul language, angry outbursts, hyperactivity, destructiveness and bullying call for stern measures. Talking to a child can help
in such situations. But a teacher needs time and lesser number of students for it. Overcrowded classrooms and a curriculum overcrowded with formal activities leave the teacher with neither patience nor the time for it.

Hence a low teacher-student ratio, suitable time table and abundance of creative activities can foster self discipline in children. Above all as Montessori had said that the adults should not only expect children to respect them but should also respect the children. Authoritative behaviour of the adults who continuously issue orders and expect compliance from children can not discipline them.

**Maintenance of Records and Registers**

As in any other organisation, in a nursery school also maintenance of records and registers is necessary. The records of the preschools can be divided into two broad categories. The first category pertains to the administrative and infrastructural affairs like attendance registers, equipment and stock register, fee books, etc. They were maintained properly. The second category of records pertains to the progress of the students. They help in tracing the progress of the children through an academic session. Ethin Kawin (1947) and later Kothari Commission
(1964-66) stressed the importance of maintaining such progress reports.

The progress reports of the students of the nursery schools reflected certain common traits which were the following:

1) The report cards were mainly designed to record the academic achievement of the children instead of all round development.

2) The evaluation system is to be cumulative and continuous (Kothari Commission- 1964-66). Hence report cards are to be maintained continuously. Instead the space provided in them were filled up only twice or thrice in a year. The information filled up did not reflect the gradual progress or trend but the achievement in a specific test held at the end of a semester.

3) Anecdotal records (Record of significant events of a child’s preschool life) had no place in the report card.

The records pertaining to the progress of the students thus had certain shortcomings. Anecdotal records are important for future guidance and counseling. Wills and Stegman (1950) have stressed the importance of anecdotal records for assessing the progress and problems of children. Maintaining anecdotal records is time consuming and requires space. Hence Moore E. F. (1988) recommended the use of microfilms for it.
But computerised method of storing data can not be advised for every preschool because of their financial constraints.

As recommended by Ethin Kawin (1947), Wills and Stegman (1950), the preschools should maintain the records of a child's family background, his intelligence quotient, reading readiness, social, emotional and physical development and not merely the academic achievement.

Link between the school and home

A school is set up by the society for the specialised teaching of its young members (Dewey). Hence it is the duty of the school to establish link with the society via the homes of its students. For the education of a child, cooperation between the home and school is necessary. The UNESCO report of 1961 stated that the preschool should collaborate with the parents and organise meetings, interviews and discussions with them. Hymes J. L. (1953) stated that link between teachers and parents help in achieving the goals of a preschool. The Programme of Action (1986) also recommended that the nursery school should seek the cooperation of the parents for the education of the children.

Most of the preschools conducted parents-teachers meetings as the chief method of establishing link with the
parents. However such meetings were held after prolonged interval. The parents too felt that these meetings should be organised frequently. All the preschools provided children with link books for exchanging information with parents. In most of the schools the link books were infrequently used. Only one of the private preschools invited the parents during the celebration of festivals. This served as a forum for developing a strong link between the school and home.

It was stated by Vanderman and Miles (1954) that inadequate communication between the parents and the teachers may hinder the achievement of the goals of the preschools. Therefore joint effort of the parents and teachers is needed. The preschools should organise parents - teachers meetings frequently and often invite parents to the schools.

Admission of children to the preschools

Most of the preschools had similar criteria for granting admission to the children. Only one of them screened the applicants through interviews of the applicants and their parents. Screening applicants for vocational courses is justified since special aptitudes, interest and even merit may be required. But in a preschool such screening is not justified.

Short E. (1974) said that preschool education should be provided to all children as a step towards total literacy. UNESCO

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report of 1961 said that when the number of seats were limited in a preschool priority should be accorded to the children with special needs like those of working or single mothers or those who are from backward and poor families.

Today reputed private preschools screen the applicants to admit those whose parents can reinforce and even supplement the things taught at the school. Children from privileged families grow up in an environment rich in intellectual stimuli like educated parents, didactic toys, books and electronic media. Hence their chances of faring well at the nursery schools and thereafter in the admission tests of school are definitely brighter. Admitting such children maintains the reputation of the institutions.

Although screening applicants at the preschools level is not a healthy practice but private preschools reserve the right to it.

**Supervision of the preschool**

Supervision is today considered to be a process which guides the teachers to perform better and improve the teaching learning situation. The *Programme of Action* (1986) recommended regular supervision of preprimary institutions.

In the preschools supervision was carried out by the principal. The *UNESCO* report of 1961 recommended that specially trained personnel should supervise nursery schools.
The principals were undoubtedly experienced but they lacked the required training. A statutory body can only ensure that supervision of the nursery schools is done properly.

**Consultation with experts**

The authorities of the nursery schools were not active in consulting experts in the field of pre school. Such consultations can benefit the schools by providing information and guidance in the matters pertaining to preschools.

**Meetings between the principal and teachers**

In the preschools the organisational hierarchy was such that the teachers worked under the principal. The principal of most of the private preschools regularly held meetings with the teachers to ensure the smooth functioning of the nursery schools. In the government preschool such meetings were not frequent.

**Human Resource of the preschools**

In the preschools there were teaching and non teaching staff. As per the recommendations of *Froebel, Montessori* and the report of *UNESCO* (1961), the teachers were all females.

The teachers were mostly graduates and post graduates. A few had qualifications like diploma in management which were not in keeping with the requirements of the job. Some of the
teachers were trained to teach in secondary schools, a few were trained to teach in nursery schools and there were some who had no training at all. However the government preschool ensured that all the teachers had the right qualification and that they were all trained.

The National Council of Teacher Education had stipulated in 1978 that those who had passed the secondary school examination and were trained (4 semesters or 2 years course) were eligible to teach in nursery schools. The necessity for the teachers to be trained had been emphasised by Froebel, Montessori, various education commissions and even the UNESCO. There was a dismal picture regarding this matter in the nursery schools.

For any organisation to function efficiently it is important that the workers are satisfied. The UNESCO report of 1961 and Programme of Action 1986, recommended that proper working conditions and status should be available to the teachers of pre schools. But the teachers of the private preschools were totally, dissatisfied with their salary. They enjoyed no benefits apart from their salary and had no job security. Inservice education was provided on rare occasions and that too to, to the teachers of very few preschools. The teachers had to attend to
overcrowded classrooms. The salary and job security of government preschools kept the teachers happy. But many of the teachers of the private preschools were on the look out for a new job. This reduced their dedication and they felt that they were being exploited.

Most of the teachers of nursery schools today are highly qualified and consider teaching in nursery schools to be beneath their dignity. Today massive unemployment and underemployment are common. Hence the situation at preschools is not surprising. The private preschools today are full of teachers who consider their job to be merely a stopgap arrangement. Although training and proper qualification are essential for teachers but it has to be admitted that in private preschools where most of the teachers lack training, teaching was done with greater sincerity than in the government preschool which had only trained teachers. Efficient administration of the preschools kept the teachers on their toes. In the government preschool with lesser accountability and greater job security, laxity was observed in the preparation and use of teaching aids, organising co curricular activities, etc.
5.3 GENERALISATIONS REGARDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE PRESCHOOLS

Generalisations regarding the infrastructure of the preschools are presented below.

Infrastructure of a preschool implies its physical facilities. It includes the school site, campus, building and equipments. It is vital for the achievement of the goals. According to Bethmoore and Richards P. (1959) improper physical conditions of a preschool influence the health and behaviour of the children. Hence serious thought and planning are required to provide proper physical conditions.

School site

Abot and Wood Commission (1936-37) suggested that the site of a preschool should be in pleasant surroundings, which are conducive to the development of the children. Wills and Stegman (1950) suggested that the site of a preschool should be high and dry and away from the traffic.

The government preschool and two of the private preschools enjoyed proper site. But two of the private preschools were in residential areas. One of these was even near the main road with heavy flow of traffic. These schools were run in
contravention to the Chandigarh administration’s rulings in this regard.

**School campus**

The site at which a nursery school is located determines to a great extent the type of school plant. Only those nursery schools, which were located in ideal sites, had spacious and green campus.

The walled campus of these schools was lined with tall trees. Shrubs, flowering plants, metalled road, garden, playground and proper building were the parts of the campus. But the preschools located in residential areas lacked a proper campus and hence its constituent elements namely playground, proper school building, gardens, etc. were unsatisfactory.

Difference was noted in the maintenance of the campus of the private and government preschools. Proper maintenance and attempts to beautify made the campus of the private preschools attractive. Even one of the private preschools which lacked space made every effort to include greenery and beauty with in its limited space. But the government preschool had a campus which was vast but not very attractive.

**School Building**

**Wills and Stegman** (1950) suggested that a preschool should be situated in the ground floor and that the building
should be spacious. Maria Montessori designed a Montessori school with several rooms. The chief one was for study and the others for music, exercise, rest, etc. Bethmoore and Richards (1959) and the report from UNESCO in 1961 recommended that there should be large well lit rooms which are adequately furnished and aesthetically decorated. The rooms should also be instructive.

The preschools were all either single storeyed or located in the ground floor of the building. But only the preschools which had spacious school plants had proper building. These preschools had spacious and well ventilated rooms. The preschools situated in residential areas faced shortage of space. Among them one had severe shortage of spacious and well ventilated classrooms. Except one private preschool all the other preschools had display boards with teaching aids in the classrooms. But teaching aids were changed regularly only in few private preschools.

Maria Montessori, Bethmoore and Richards (1959) had recommended that there should be facilities for storage like cupboards, books case, etc. in the classrooms. Except one private preschool the others had all these facilities.
Regarding the safety measures to be adopted by a preschool the above mentioned authors had said that the floors should be clean, non slippery and tidy. Loose electrical wires, broken furniture and glass panes should be taken care of. Overall sanitary conditions should be maintained. All the private preschools followed these guidelines. But in the government preschool in some classrooms broken furniture was stored. Furniture used in this school needed repair. The condition of the toilet was not totally sanitary. The classrooms not only had safety hazards but also looked unattractive.

Maria Montessori had recommended light and portable furniture for the children. All the preschools followed this guideline. But only in a few private preschools the furniture was not only light and portable but was also brightly painted.

The seating arrangement in the prenursery class of all the nursery schools was informal and allowed free movement of the children. But in the nursery (LKG) and UKG free movement of the children was restricted. Those sitting near the walls could not move about freely.

The nursery schools had a proper office, drinking water facilities and most of them had hygienically maintained toilets.
Hall was there in few nursery schools. Thus proper school building was not possessed by all the nursery schools.

**Playground**

The nursery schools, which had proper school plant, had spacious playground with outdoor equipments. The others in the residential area lacked proper playground. These preschools used a small space with a few equipments as a playground. But the children had no space to run and play. *Secondary Education Commission* (1952-53) had said that the children from urban homes often did not have the space to play. The nursery schools should therefore compensate for it. Unfortunately the students of nursery schools operating from residences faced the problem regarding space even at school. *Sherer L.* (1959) had said that space as well as equipments are required for the development of muscles and motor skills in children. But some of the private preschools failed to comply with this. That the playground should be on one side of the school building for easy supervision was stated by *Wills and Stegman* 1950. All the preschools followed this guideline.

The swings of all the nursery schools posed safety hazard because of the wooden seats. The seat could hit a child passing its path. Rubber tires are better alternatives to wooden seats. In one of the nursery schools, a discarded cement pipe had been modeled into a toy train. This shows how inexpensive play
ground equipments can be fashioned out of discarded and locally available things. Old rubber tires, pipes, sand pits, crates, etc. can be used in nursery schools as play ground equipments.

**Miscellaneous Equipments**

The list of equipments necessary for a nursery school has been provided earlier (page no. 302). None of the nursery schools possessed the right number and types of outdoor equipments. Only a few nursery schools possessed musical instruments. Even that was few in number and not meant for the children. Most of the schools had display boards with teaching aids but only one had flash cards and abacus. Some books, toys, materials for gardening and cleaning were possessed by all the schools. The rest of the things recommended in the list were lacking. Hence the preschools were short in their possession of the necessary types and number of equipments.

5.4 GENERALISATIONS REGARDING THE CURRICULAR ISSUES OF THE PRESCHOOLS

Generalisations regarding the curricular issues of the nursery schools are presented hereafter.
Framing of the curriculum

Framing the curriculum of a nursery school requires great care and hard work. This process can be considerably simplified by resorting to the work done by the experts in this field.

Educationists like **Froebel, Montessori** and **Annie Besant** stressed that the nursery schools should foster the physical and social development of the children. Instead of directly engaging them in mental exercises, first their senses should be trained so that they are fully equipped to perform mental exercises later on. **Gandhiji** too supported this view and in addition to it desired that the children should develop the right attitude towards manual work from the preschool stage.

**Abot and Wood Commission** (1936-37), **Secondary Education Commission** (1952-53) and then **Kothari Commission** (1964-66) expressed that the curriculum of a preschool should mainly foster physical and social development of the children, and develop healthy habits and right attitudes in them and develop the readiness to read and write. Authors like **Jerome and Leavitt** (1958) and **Hammond S.L. et. al.** (1963), too expressed similar views. They also required that the curriculum should help the development of the ability of self expression in the children. Thus from these recommendations it
can be inferred that the main criterion for framing the curriculum should be that it ensures balanced development of the personality of the children. The emphasis should be on the physical and social development of the children and the training of their senses.

The nursery schools framed their own curriculum. The main criteria for this task were the goals of the school, the curriculum followed in other nursery schools and the ability of the curriculum to develop the foundation for future schooling.

The goals of the nursery school being used as a criterion to frame the curriculum was justified since only the ends can determine the means to be used. The second criterion was the curriculum followed in other nursery schools. This simplified the otherwise arduous task of framing the curriculum. It curtailed creativity and the defects in the curriculum of one preschool crept into that of the others. It however ensured the popularity of the curriculum among the parents.

The third criterion was that the curriculum should be able to develop the foundation for future schooling. It is true that preschools are stepping stones that lead to future schooling. The view of Mohanty J. (1984), was reflected in the Programme of Action (1986) which stated that pre primary institutions are the
feeders and supporters of the programme of Universal Elementary Education. However, if this guideline is followed in the true spirit then preparation for schooling can be equated to the development of the ability to cope up with the demands of schooling viz. ability to get on in a social environment, express oneself, be physically healthy and be ready to acquire the organised bodies of knowledge. That the guideline does not imply only cognitive enhancement can be inferred from the warning of the Programme of Action (1986) against the early introduction of the 3 Rs. However it was found that the criterion to develop the foundation for future schooling has been interpreted by the nursery schools to suit the needs of the admission tests held by the schools. Hence it can be equated mainly to mental growth of the children.

Due to the lack of regular inservice education for the teachers, access to the information about the latest developments in the field of preschool education was limited and could not be incorporated in the curriculum. In the absence of any statutory body to supervise the nursery schools and guide them, the recommendations of the experts take a back seat during the process of framing of the curriculum.
The curriculum followed in the different nursery schools

Froebel said that in a kindergarten the children should be given freedom. They should enjoy and have maximum opportunity to play since playing is the most natural and spontaneous activity of a child. Music, training of the senses, activities related to self expression and creative work should be the other activities of a kindergarten. Maria Montessori stressed the importance of training of the senses and the total development of the personality of the children. Montessori and Gandhiji both desired the inclusion of manual work in the curriculum. Montessori also expressed that the curriculum of a nursery school should be of two types. The first should cater to the needs and interests of the children and the second one should be centered on activities related to the training of the senses and not on learning. Froebel too attached great importance to it and devised special teaching aids for training the senses. This is because senses are the inlets of the stimuli available in the environment and intelligence today is defined as the ability to process the information received through the senses. Hence the preschools are not centres for learning but are the centers to foster the ability to learn. Facts and information have no place in the curriculum of a preschool. Gans Roma and Stendler (1952) suggested that passing on organised body of knowledge is not the function of the preschool. They should
foster the skill to acquire knowledge with confidence through the abilities to think and reason.

From the above mentioned guidelines it can be inferred that the main function of the curriculum of a nursery school should be to foster the total development of the personality with emphasis on social and physical development. The curriculum should have a flexible and informal nature. It should foster the skills related to reception, expression and thought (Brophy and Nedler, 1975). Without the ability of expression, socialization is not possible. Hence linguistic development, which is the foundation of mental and social development, has an important place in the curriculum. Narration of events, recitation, dramatisation should be the integral parts of curriculum. The development of the innate abilities and creativity of the children and arousal of curiosity in their environment should be the other functions of the curriculum. Hence outdoor lessons should be imparted.

Above all the curriculum should be related to the daily life and interests of the children. It should be child centered and based on projects and activities (Forest Ilse, 1949). It should be holistic in nature (National Policy of Education 1986). Lovell K. (1964) stressed that the ability to classify information
is fundamental for future learning and this can be achieved chiefly by the training of the senses.

The curricula followed in the various preschools were basically similar. There were 2 distinct parts—academic part with emphasis on the 3 Rs and the non-academic part.

The academic part of the curriculum included 2 languages. The children of preschools of urban India are expected to read and even write two languages. The stress was on English, which has a heavier syllabus than that of Hindi. The children were even expected to do grammatical exercises in English and write compositions. Children recited rhymes usually in English and rarely learnt Hindi poems. The themes of even the common nursery rhymes were related to an alien culture. Children often recited them without comprehending them. Hindi poems would be easier for them. But the parents of urban areas and hence the nursery schools stressed English rhymes.

Linguistic development is essential for thought, expression and hence socialisation. But the abilities to write and converse in a foreign language are not required at this stage. Mother tongue or a language close to it is more suitable for this.

The syllabus of arithmetic was helpful in developing the skill of counting and performing simple exercises. It was in
keeping with the age and requirement of the children. But the
course content of science (General Knowledge) of the private
preschools was full of facts and information about the
environment. Many of these facts were not related to the daily
life and interest of the children. For e.g. the information on
marine and fresh water animals is superfluous since few
children of north India have the concept of the difference
between ocean and river.

Thus although Gans Roma and Stendler (1952) had
suggested about half a century ago that a curriculum stressing
the 3 Rs is outdated, it is followed even now. The attempts to
train the senses are negligible. The syllabus of general knowledge
and English has several superfluous topics that encourage
cramming.

The defects of the curriculum of schools were pointed out
by Secondary Education Commission (1952-53). Some of the
defects are that the curriculum is bookish, divided into water
tight compartments, exam oriented, not child centered, has no
place for mother tongue, etc. It was seen that the curriculum
of the urban preschools too suffered from these defects.
The non academic part of the curriculum of the nursery schools consisted of several types of activities which were the following.

**Musical Activities**

Activities related to music like singing, playing toy instruments and dancing have several benefits, which have been stated earlier. Froebel attached great importance to the songs taught in the kindergarten. Foster and Headley (1959) felt that music has therapeutic value and helps in catharsis.

In few of the preschools songs were taught regularly but only for a brief period of time. No toy instruments were there. In the other preschools musical activities were limited to the prayer sung during the morning assembly.

**Art and Craft**

Activities related to art and craft provide the opportunity to develop the creativity of the children. According to Wills and Stegman (1950), drawing, colouring, paper cutting, etc. help in developing dexterity of fingers and motor skills. According to Hammond S. L. (1963), art in nursery schools provide the opportunity for self expression in visual form, develop fine motor skill, eye hand coordination and the teacher can use it as a projective method to gain insight into the inner world of the children. Thus the benefits of such activities are many. In the nursery schools drawing
and colouring were the main activities. Variety in activities related to art was there in very few schools.

**Games**

Indoor and outdoor games should be integral parts of the curriculum. Froebel attached special importance to play. He said that playing is a spontaneous process which develops independence and provides pleasure and satisfaction. All educationists, education commissions and specialists in the field of preschool education share the view that physical exercises are indispensable for children. Development of larger muscles, motor skills and the ability to socialise develop through games. Hence it is the duty of every nursery school to provide the children ample time to play and to provide suitable equipment for play. Indoor games with toys, puzzles, blocks were not organised daily. Organisation of games can encourage even the shy children to actively participate in physical activities. It was rarely done.

**Stories**

The importance of stories in the curriculum of a preschool has been mentioned earlier. In few nursery schools, stories were narrated frequently. This could be improved further by dramatisation of the stories and asking the children to narrate them. Hammond S.L. et al. (1963) said that dramatisation of stories develop the ability of expression and fosters creativity and moral development.
Morning Assembly

In the nursery schools the morning assembly was a regular feature. The working day was started with it. It initiated children into a disciplined life and provided spiritual training. Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhiji had stressed the importance of spiritual training at educational institutions. The morning assembly held in the nursery schools was the beginning of such training. The morning assembly of a few preschools were enriched with miscellaneous activities like mass P.T., celebration of birthday of the children, singing of hymns, etc. The other nursery schools can emulate this.

Celebration of festivals

The celebration of festivals is a potent means to develop link with the community. It helps in conserving and transmitting the culture of the community. Celebration of national festivals develops nationalistic feelings. The nursery schools celebrated several festivals. But only one of them invited parents to participate in the celebration.

Trips

Rousseau, Comenius and Pestalozzi stressed the importance of providing first hand experience to the children to facilitate learning. Gans Roma and Stendler (1952) said that children are by nature curious. They love to explore. Trips can help them in exploring their environment. Cohen and Rudolph (1977) said that learning is
more from life than from books. Since early experiences of life greatly influence later behaviour hence children should learn directly from their environment. Trips can help in such direct learning.

Some of the nursery schools organised trips but they were meant only for recreation. Educational tours were not organised. Along with trips to amusement parks, those to farms, poultries, fields etc. can provide rich experiences as well as delight. Hammond S.L. et. al.(1963) suggested the means to further enrich the benefits of a trip. He said that the children should be asked to recall their experiences to develop linguistic ability. A further improvisation of this method would be to ask children to express their experiences pictorially.

Cultural Programmes

Apart from the celebration of festivals, cultural programmes consisting of songs, dances, skits, etc. were organised by a few nursery schools. The government preschool selected a few students for the cultural activities held once in a year. This was a discriminatory practice. Organising such programmes regularly will enable the participation of more children.

Thus the academic part of the curriculum had a formal nature. It included two languages, arithmetic and general knowledge. The non academic part was informal in nature. Introducing variety in activities related to art and music could enrich it. Games should be organised. Indoor play, narration of stories, trips and cultural
programmes, could enrich the curriculum. Manual work like gardening, cleaning the campus, looking after pets, etc. can inculcate dignity of labour. Rajni Kumar (1964) said that besides developing dignity of labour, manual work is thoroughly enjoyed by children. Hence activities that are constructive should be part of the curriculum.

The teachers of all the nursery schools and several parents admitted that the curriculum was biased towards formal activities and was not an ideal one. But they were all of the view that because of the demands of the private schools, the children had to master the activities related to the 3 Rs. Hence the present curriculum was satisfactory to the private schools, parents and the teachers.

**Time table of the nursery schools**

Following a time table rigidly is not important in a nursery school. But today urban nursery schools have definite syllabus for languages, arithmetic and science. A definite part of the syllabus has to be completed with in a given time (semester). Moreover in the different sections of a class uniformity of progress had to be maintained. Hence a more or less rigid timetable has gained importance in a nursery school toady.

In the nursery schools, the time table was framed at the beginning of the session. Only one of the schools allowed the children of the prenursery class to play through out the working hours at the beginning of the session. This practice helped in reducing the trauma.
the children faced on leaving home and entering a new environment. **Foster and Headley** (1959) prepared a schedule for a nursery school in which only 15-30 minutes were allotted for the learning of various skills by the children. Problem solving and creative work were allotted 30-60 minutes. The time remaining from the 3 hours schedule was meant for play, rest, refreshment and recreation. **Hammond S.L.et. al.** (1963), allotted only 30 minutes for formal teaching and learning. One hour was to be spent in outdoor activities. The time remaining from the 3½ hours schedule was meant for rest, recreation and refreshment. **Rao and Islam** (1997) prepared a 3 ½ hours schedule for a nursery school in which the time for formal learning was not to exceed an hour.

Thus it can be inferred that the time table of a nursery school should set aside enough time for play and creative activities. Not more than an hour should be spent in formal activities like reading, writing and doing sums.

In the nursery schools the time table followed reflected uniformity in the basic pattern. The time allotted for formal activities was equal or much more than that of informal activities. The time spent by the children outdoors was much less than that spent at their desks.

**Wills and Stegman** (1950), suggested that the nursery school should provide the children the scope to socialise, plan, execute the plan, organise, obey, shoulder responsibility, enjoy freedom, make
suggestions, be aware of rights and duties. For this children need to work in groups. Playing, gardening, caring for pets, cleaning the campus, dramatising, etc. are more important than spending long hours at the desk alone.

The time table followed in the nursery schools reflected that playing is not considered to be important even at the preschool stage. Even a spacious play ground with all its equipments can not provide the desired effect if children do not get the time to use them.

In the nursery schools with 3 to 3½ hours schedule, half or even more of the total time was spent in academic activities. Activities related to art also confined children to their desks. Hence most of the time was spent by a child doing solitary work.

The time table of some preschools was such that academic and non academic activities were placed alternately. This reduced fatigue and monotony. But in some nursery schools, especially the government nursery school, academic activities were performed at a stretch. This tires the children, makes them inattentive and even indisciplined.

The preschools had more periods for teaching English than that for Hindi. This was because the course content of English was more elaborate than that of Hindi. It clearly reflected the bias towards English. The time table of the government nursery school included periods for art and craft only once in a week. This was much lesser than that of the private nursery schools, which held art classes on
every working day. Periods for music, stories and manual work were either not held or were held very infrequently.

Thus the study of the time table of the nursery schools endorsed the views generated from the study of their curriculum. The nursery schools attached great importance to academic activities over non-academic ones. Hence solitary work took precedence over team work. It is said that modern education system develops lop-sided personalities. This is seen to begin from infancy. Individuals with superior mental abilities are in demand and it appears that their weak emotional and social sides can be condoned.

According to Jerome and Leavitt (1958) and Ray Rucker (1960) modern kindergarten should be a place where children can play, socialise and learn. But today the time table of a nursery school makes it mainly a centre for learning. The emphasis is still on the 3 Rs, which was considered to be outdated decades ago. In addition the infants are burdened with a definite syllabus of science which requires learning by rote rather than by learning from direct experiences.

Rao and Islam (1997) had said that the children’s momentary and transitory needs and interests are made subservient to adult beliefs regarding the achievement and the skills to be mastered. The skills considered to be important by adults dominate the children’s interest and needs. The best insurance for a successful adulthood are the day to day, child centered experiences, which will make the children independent and competent. The education system should be
enriched and the environment should be made permissive with informal activities. The emphasis should be on the abilities of the children. This observation highlights the main drawback of the curriculum and the time table of the modern nursery schools which is the over emphasis on the three Rs and neglect of creative activities and play.

**Method of teaching adopted in the nursery schools**

*Froebel’s* view that teaching in a preschool should be through play way method, was reiterated by the *Programme of Action* (1986), which recommended that playing and learning should be integrated. *Montessori* said that children were considered to be empty containers that needed to be filled up by constant flow of information. Adults tried to mould them into predetermined shapes and thus suppressed their personality. Hence she said that the role of the teachers of a Montessori school should only be to organise suitable experiences and let the children learn through their own experiences and didactic materials. They can thus pace their own learning. Children of 3-6 years have an extremely absorbent mind. They can develop the ability to think and solve problems if an enriched environment is provided to them.

The teaching method followed in the nursery schools is discussed through the following points:
Revision: Revision of the earlier lesson (s) was taken up before initiating a new one. This refreshed the old learning and rooted new experiences to old ones.

Introduction: Introduction to a new lesson is essential to create an interest in it. But it was not a regular feature. Introduction through relevant questions can arrest the attention of the children.

Teaching the skill to read and write: During the presentation of a new lesson, oral work preceded written work. Again before learning the skill of writing, the children spent some weeks making straight and slanting lines, curves, etc. This developed the foundation for writing. Bright and Gregor (1982) and later Kohli (1996) and then Bhatiya (1996) supported the presently popular view that the skill to read should be taught before the skill to write. But Maria Montessori said that children should be allowed to scribble. They should then read the shapes that have emerged or they have created. This method makes learning child-centered but is time-consuming and unsuitable for overcrowded classrooms. It does not suit an exam-oriented curriculum.

The skill to read English in most of the nursery schools was through the phonic method. The sounds commonly associated with the alphabets are mastered first and a word is read through its constituent phonemes or sounds rather than through its spelling or constituent letters. English is not a phonic language like Hindi. A letter can have different sounds. But this method has several
supporters like Kohli (1996) who feel that it rapidly develops the skill to read. Word drills were conducted by all the nursery schools to facilitate reading.

While teaching the skill to write most of the nursery schools followed the maxim of simple to complex. The alphabets and numbers that were easier to write were taken up first. All the nursery schools followed the maxim of analytic to synthetic. The alphabets and numbers were taught through their constituent parts. Following these maxims facilitated learning.

The skill to write was developed in all the nursery schools with the help of printed books/workbooks having dotted lines. Thus the methods adopted to teach the skill of writing was suitable for the children of the nursery schools.

**Ability to Converse in English**: In the private nursery schools, the teachers tried to develop the ability to converse in English in the children. In few of these schools this was done by teaching the children the answers or responses to the commonly asked questions and phrases. In some of the other private preschools the teachers usually talked to the children in English. This was better than the first method since it at least developed the ability to comprehend spoken English. The ability to speak in English could be developed better if the children were provided with the scope to narrate, describe and discuss in English. Teaching aids like colourful illustrations, real objects and individual attention from the teachers could greatly help
in this direction. Dramatisation of stories, role playing, language games can also help.

**Recitation of Rhymes**: The children of all the nursery schools were taught to recite rhymes. Only in a few nursery schools the necessary actions, expressions and voice modulations were taught while teaching rhymes. This helps to some extent in clarifying the content of the rhyme because word by word translation is neither possible nor does it fully provide the enjoyment of recitation. A three years old child who barely has any idea about abstract things like countries can not be expected to understand the meanings of rhymes like Pussy cat where have you been or London bridge is falling down. But if colourful illustrations are shown, actions and expressions are performed the child can have an idea about what he is reciting. Today audio and video cassettes with nursery rhymes having a simple rhythm and tune are easily available. They can be utilised as aids for teaching rhymes.

Thus multiple methods were adopted by the nursery schools to teach English. Developing the skills of conversation, recitation, ability to read, write and even do simple grammatical exercises were the methods used. For Hindi it was limited to teaching the skills of reading and writing alphabets and simple words.

**Teaching arithmetic**: While teaching the skill of doing arithmetic, analytic to synthetic method was used in the nursery schools. The constituent steps were taught separately. However mathematics is a
subject that deals with abstractions. Hence chalk and blackboard are not sufficient aids. Abacus and other concrete materials are needed to teach arithmetic in a nursery school.

**Teaching Science**: In the nursery schools teaching and learning of science (General knowledge) was mainly through oral sessions of questions and answers. The children were expected to memorise the facts and information provided in the books. The teaching aids were usually restricted to the illustrations in the books. **Kothari D.S.** (1964) had said that learning science is by doing science. But activities and projects had no place in the curriculum. Sowing seeds in the garden or pots or even empty ice cream cups filled with soil and asking children to water the plants can explain the process of germination and the parts of a plant. Similarly caring for pets, studying the local flora and fauna, etc. can help in teaching science. Educational tours to zoo, poultry, farms, dairies, fields, fire station, tracing a letter posted in a letter box to its delivery, visit to sites of construction, watching carpenters, masons, cobblers work can provide first hand experience about the immediate environment. **Kothari Commission** (1964-66) had said that the preprimary schools should stimulate the intellectual curiosity of the children. If the children are made to memorise lists of the names of occupations, those of birds, wild animals, sea animals, etc. their intellectual curiosity will not be stimulated.
Motivation: The teachers of the nursery schools tried to motivate the children by verbal and written appreciation, nod of approval and smile. Montessori had advocated against the use of material incentives since motivation should be intrinsic. Foster and Headley (1959) said that not only motivation but also constructive criticism can facilitate learning. Gans Roma et al. (1952) expressed that motivation reinforces learning. Thorndike’s Law of Effect says that if the effects of learning is pleasant then learning is facilitated. For children appreciation from teachers is a pleasant effect. Hence motivation is rewarding for the children. But the scope for frequent motivation is limited in most of the nursery schools. This is because of infrequent oral questioning by the teachers of most of the nursery schools.

Revision: Revision is important to refresh and retain the experiences acquired earlier. In all the nursery schools the teachers took enough pain to ensure that children had enough scope for revision.

Questioning during teaching: Frequent questioning during teaching has several advantages. It keeps students attentive, encourages thought and expression, relates one subject with another and provides revision. Questions can be asked during revision, introduction, presentation and recapitulation.

A lesson can even be developed by repeated questioning. In very few nursery schools frequent questioning accompanied teaching. Questioning was more frequent during revision than during the
course of a lesson. Developing a lesson with the help of answers from students and simultaneously integrating the subjects taught and correlating the lesson to the daily life of the children was done with efficiency in only one nursery school. It made learning child centered to a great extent and arrested the attention of the children throughout the lesson.

**Use of teaching aids:** Froebel and Montessori designed special teaching aids to train the senses of the children. Montessori designed didactic teaching aids to minimize the interference of the teachers in the learning process. The benefits of teaching aids are many. They make abstractions concrete, maximize the use of the senses and create interest. In most of the nursery schools teaching aids were limited to the blackboard and chalk. Even if there were pictures and charts in the display board, they were neither changed nor frequently used. Only in very few private schools a variety of teaching aids like pictures, charts and real objects were used. In only one of the private preschools teaching aids in the display board were frequently changed. Only in this school the teachers regularly prepared masks, charts, hand puppets and flash cards. Language games and flash cards that are essential teaching aids for teaching the skill to read were used only by this preschool. The other nursery schools too could greatly benefit if they could emulate the use of teaching aids as done by this nursery school.
Home work and correction of written work: In all but one of the
nursery schools, home work was a regular feature. Even the children
of prenursery class were not spared. It is true that home work
reinforces class work but with stress on formal work at schools,
repeating the same at home by the children still in their infancy
poses a burden on them. Education commissions, educationists and
specialists in preschool education have not recommended homework
at the preschool stage.

The nursery school, which refrained from assigning home
work, did so not out of any concern for the work load of the children
but it was because of the belief that the parents would not care to get
it done by the children. Though the practice of this preschool is
healthy but the justification is poor. However it clarifies the fact that
children of preschool age are too young to understand the significance
of home work and hence are forced to do it by parents. It also
increases the amount of written work to be checked by the teachers
and increases their work load.

Evaluation system of the nursery schools

As stated before evaluation of the progress of the children is
essential to assess the efficiency of the means to reach the goals and
to determine the strong and weak points of the children. The goals of
the nursery schools had always been stated to be to develop balanced
personality in the children and to develop the foundation for future
schooling. However the study of the curriculum and the time table
makes one doubtful about its veracity. It has been found that the main goal of the nursery schools was to develop the cognitive abilities of the children and in the case of private nursery schools it was to prepare children to face the stiff competition during admission to the schools. This was also reflected in the evaluation system of the nursery schools.

The main concern of the evaluation system of the nursery schools was to periodically assess the academic achievement of the children. In most of the nursery schools, semester system was practised. Class tests were also held regularly. This ensured that the problems faced by the children could be specifically diagnosed. The tools of evaluation were written and oral tests for academic achievement and observation by the teacher for the other traits of the personality.

The Kothari Commission (1964-66) had suggested that evaluation should be continuous and comprehensive. However in the nursery schools evaluation was mainly of the performance of the children at the terminal tests at the end of a semester. Hence it was not continuous, Evaluation was mainly of academic achievement. Hence it was not comprehensive.

In the government nursery school medical check up of the students was done annually. But the private preschools were not very concerned about the physical well being of the children. The progress report mentioned certain traits like the ability to socialise, neatness,
independence, cooperativeness, etc. But it is well known that teachers could not observe the children properly when the classrooms were overcrowded and most of the working hours was spent in academic work. Nor were any anecdotal records maintained to assess social and emotional development of the children. Hence without these tools such traits were evaluated cursorily and not much importance was paid to them.

Another shortcoming of the evaluation system of some of the nursery schools was the use of marks instead of grades. In some nursery schools academic achievement was assessed by awarding marks and the social and emotional traits by grades. Four decades ago Kothari Commission had recommended that grades should replace marks. The system of awarding marks is subjective and entices children and even their parents into an unhealthy competition.

Thus the evaluation system reflected the goals and the means (curriculum and time table) adopted to achieve the goals. It leant heavily towards the assessment of academic achievement and overlooked the other aspects of the personality. The teachers and parents were satisfied with the present system although they admitted the shortcomings.

**Books used by the nursery schools**

The private nursery schools used greater number of books than the government nursery school. For languages and mathematics
there were separate books. Even for science there was a separate book in the private nursery schools.

Most of the books used in the different nursery schools were similar since the criteria for selecting them were similar. The books commonly used in the different nursery schools and their content were the deciding factors for selecting them. The illustrations, binding, print, etc. were not accorded much importance.

**Content of the books**: The content of the books was suitable to achieve the target of preparing children for the academic demands of modern schools. The praise worthy points were that the children could learn through the principle of association of the printed text with the accompanying illustration(s). Secondly it provided the scope for revision as a new concept was repeated frequently in the subsequent pages. Thirdly there was enough scope for drill. Fourth point was that the content was related to the interests of the children. Hence toys, candies, ice creams, etc. were used instead of pens, pencils, books, etc. Finally the content was organised in simple to difficult order.

The content of the book on science or general knowledge was however, crowded with several superfluous facts and information. Too many topics were included in the content of this book. Again under a topic too many items were included. For instance about ten to twelve examples of flowers, birds, wild animals, etc. were crammed into a single page.
Illustrations: The books used were full of colourful illustrations. They were at the required place adjoining the corresponding printed text. But they were often smaller than the desired size and the colours were pale. The bright illustrations of books of several foreign publications are much more attractive as well as instructive. In certain pages too many small illustrations were crammed. This defeated to a great extent the purpose of providing illustrations in the children's books.

Print: The prints of the books were clear and bold. But in the books used to teach the skill of reading, the print should have been bolder so that the children were not confused while switching from one line to another.

Binding of the books: Most of the books had cardboard binding. Some had paper binding, which were unsuitable for children who are too young to handle books.

Quality of paper: The papers used were neither very thick nor wax coated. Water proof papers are more suitable for children.

The parents in general were satisfied with the books used but complained about the high prices. The teachers were satisfied with the books and felt that those with better illustrations and paper would further escalate their price. The quality of books can be improved only if the government subsidises them as those published by the NCERT.
Notebooks used by the nursery schools

Specially designed notebooks with four or five lines or squares were used. This was to guide the children in developing the concept of writing within a given space.