

Teachers and Parents' Perceptions about Learning Abilities and Skills among Children at Montessori Classes

M. Imran Yousuf^{*}, and Muhammad Imran^{**}

Abstract

Montessori school system has its preference in the market of pre-schooling in Pakistan. The study was designed to highlight the perceptions of parents and teachers about learning experiences, internal abilities, behavior and skills produced through Montessori System of Education. The target population consisted of parents of students and teachers at Montessori classes in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Twenty schools were purposively selected and from each school, four teachers and four parents were invited to participate in survey research voluntarily. Sample of eighty parents and eighty teachers was available. A self-developed questionnaire was developed to cover the aspects of learning experiences, internal abilities, behavior and skills among children in Montessori classes. Items were developed on a five points Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Pilot testing was completed on ten parents and ten teachers selected conveniently. This study concludes that teachers and parents were satisfied with the students' learning experiences, understanding new experiences, willingness to try new things and self-creating process. Whereas parents were uncertain about application of concepts, encouragement for new experiences, practical life skills, art of respect for others, independent learning, sense of responsibility, chase for best performance and thinking abilities among students in Montessori classes.

Keywords: Montessori education, classroom environment, skill development, learning experiences, internal abilities.

^{*} Associate Professor (Education), PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi

^{**} Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Preston University, Islamabad

Introduction

Pre-schooling is important and parents are attracted to such systems of education to generate the skills among them which may help to enable for future education and successful life. Montessori school system is providing their services in the market. There are a number of schools in her name and claiming to offer a system of education based on Montessori Method. The principles of Montessori methods are applied in these institutions and the environment is a natural process of learning as proposed by Maria Montessori.

Maria Montessori a physician of Italy experienced her early life in a society where female were not given equal educational opportunities as men. She proved herself a brilliant student and completed her graduation in medicine at University of Rome (Italy). At first her focus of research was on mentally retarded children, which kept her shifting the attention towards welfare of deprived children. She continued her studies in Philosophy, Anthropology and Psychology with practice as medical doctor. She further initiated a school for deprived children at San Lorenzo (Rome) in 1906 with limited resources.

Resources were limited but her thoughts were so great. To make her great ideas in practice, she got economic way of developing furniture, equipments and learning toys with the help of a carpenter. So an experience of creating an environment for children was there, where they could reflect discipline, attentive work and joy. The claim of self-creating process by creating a learning environment in presence of social setting, self creating equipments were prepared for educating the senses first and then mind. Such activities were based on shift of sight towards reading and touching towards writing.

John Dewey stressed the need to educate children for life. At this early stage, growth and development of children remains a major focus for putting such skills which can grow into good habits and are required for their future potential performance in every walk of life. All this is preparation for life and a strong base for matured learning (Singh, 1997).

Bloom (1985) highlighted the importance of early years of children for effective intellectual functioning and considered these early years significant in personality development. Many social behaviors like sympathy, cooperation, imitation, rivalry, responsibility, friendliness, social approval, sharing and dependency are targeted for children in preschool classes.

At these institutions emotional problems of children can be handled properly. Play is the best way to develop pleasant emotions. Teachers should accept the feeling of young children by giving weight age to their positive feelings (Kaul, 1995).

Temperament and play contribute an important role in socio-emotional development in young children. Temperament of child is decided by parents, school and other members of the society. Play has been considered an important part of curricula in Montessori program (Singh, 1997).

Parents and teachers are the most important factors in promoting curiosity in young children. Parents and teachers should provide new and unusual stimuli to children. Answers of the children's question should be given. They should not be given any threaten. Children should be motivated for making drawings, paintings etc. Every country always needs creative persons, without creative talents, no country can enjoy their present standard of living. Curiosity and brain functioning are two important sources of creativity (Jeon, 2017).

Socio-cultural and educational background of the family was found more important factor which affect language development in young children (Shojaei & Gholami, 2016). Murlidharan and Banerje (1974) reported that preschool experiences help in language development. The acquisition of language in Montessori children is a remarkable phenomenon. Picture reading, creative self expression play an important role in the development of language as well as creativity in young children.

Quality of education of preschool education depends upon well of student-teacher interaction. At preschool level good salary of teacher can improve the quality of interaction between students and teachers (Hua et al., 2017). The teacher should create democratic and more congeal classroom environment so that children should feel free and comfortable. More emphasis should be paid on experimentation and learning by doing. Children with a supportive environment can develop skill in areas in which they show potential (Wright & Feslar, 1987).

'Didactic Apparatus' developed by Montessori was based on scientific procedures adopted for sensory training for the children. Self care skills were targeted in this method of teaching learning.

Researches in education have found that creativity can be taught and that creative teaching makes a difference. Teachers have a better chance of improving creative potential than intellectual potential. Pellegrini (1984) found that the guided exploration questioning technique is a more effective facilitator of associative fluency than a free play treatment.

As per learning at early stage, children differ from adults; they have sensitive developmental periods for their learning. Being a natural process, education should be based on self experiences and develop a learning environment through child's observation in early days (Bento & Dias, 2017).

New materials are presented before the child that they can master it in little steps easily. The fear of failure is kept away by making confidence level much high among children in Montessori environment. Activities are so arranged in classroom that they can learn to take control of their life and mature work habits.

Objectives of the Study

This study was based on the following objectives.

- To study the Montessori Method and its potential at pre-schooling.
- To highlight the perceptions of parents and teachers about learning experiences, internal abilities, behavior and skills produced through Montessori System of Education.
- To identify the gaps between claims of teachers and parents' level of satisfaction towards Montessori class environment.

Research Methodology

Population and Sampling:

The population of the study consisted of all the teachers and parents of children studying at Montessori classes. Target population consisted of parents of students and teachers at Montessori classes in Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Purposive sampling technique was applied to target a sample of parents and teachers. Twenty schools were purposively selected where Montessori classes were arranged. From each school, four teachers and four parents were invited to participate in survey voluntarily. In this way total sample of eighty parents and eighty teachers was available for conduct of survey.

Tool of Research

Being survey study, questionnaire was preferred as tool of research. A self developed questionnaire was developed to cover the aspects of learning experiences, internal abilities, behavior and skills being matured among children at Montessori classes. Items were developed on five points Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Single tool was used to get the perceptions of both types of respondents i.e. parents and teachers.

Pilot Testing

Pilot testing was done before collecting the data on questionnaire. Pilot testing was done on small selected sample other than the actual sample of study, ten parents and ten teachers was selected conveniently for this purpose. Face validity was improved experts opinions and Chronbach Alpha reliability calculated was 0.86 which shows its high reliability.

Data Analysis

Findings

Data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed in Terms of percentage and Means Score. The findings drawn out from the data analysis are given bellow.

Table 1

Parents and Teachers' Perceptions about Learning Experiences of Children at Montessori Classes

Statements	Respondents	Responses					Mean Score
		SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	
Application of concepts are promoted	Teachers	28	42	7	3	0	4.2
	Parents	11	12	24	21	12	2.9
Trusting new experiences are encouraged	Teachers	18	45	16	0	1	4.0
	Parents	10	39	10	11	10	3.4
Learning experiences enable the child to enhance their knowledge	Teachers	30	30	14	6	0	4.1
	Parents	30	34	7	5	4	4.0
The child's desire to learn is encouraged	Teachers	10	27	28	14	1	3.4
	Parent s	30	26	16	4	4	3.9
Students feel the teachers as facilitators	Teachers	25	30	24	1	0	4.0
	Parents	20	29	18	8	5	3.6
Students' interests are kept forth	Teachers	23	50	6	1	0	4.2
	Parents	29	20	12	9	10	3.6
Understanding the new experiments is produced	Teachers	20	35	24	1	0	3.9
	Parents	20	39	8	4	9	3.7

Table 1 reflects the perceptions of parents and teachers about the learning experiences by the children at Montessori classes. Mean score values show that teachers accepted that application of concepts was being promoted among children (Mean 4.2), whereas parents were found uncertain (Mean 2.9) about these phenomena. Encouragement for new experiences was claimed to be promoted by teachers, whereas parents showed their uncertain response in this regard (Mean 3.4). Teachers were found uncertain to declare that child's desire to learn was encouraged (Mean 3.4) whereas parents were found satisfied by this aspect. Further it is obvious that both teachers and

parents were satisfied (Range of mean values within 3.6 to 4.2) with the learning experiences enabling the children to enhance their knowledge, feeling teachers as facilitators, understanding new experiences and that students' interests were kept forth in classes.

Table 2

Parents and Teachers' Perceptions about Internal Abilities of Children at Montessori Classes

Statements	Respondents	Responses					Mean Score
		SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	
Hidden ability of children are recognized	Teachers	29	33	16	1	1	4.1
	Parents	20	38	19	1	2	3.9
Self realization of the children is increased	Teachers	20	39	19	1	1	4.0
	Parents	28	35	12	4	1	4.1
Students feel themselves to be in conducive environment	Teachers	32	33	14	1	0	4.2
	Parents	26	27	20	6	1	3.9
Sensory refinement takes place	Teachers	28	33	16	1	2	4.1
	Parents	24	30	15	10	1	3.8
Children learn to generate their educational environment	Teachers	24	29	22	4	1	3.9
	Parents	11	30	10	21	8	3.2
The feeling of concentration is produced	Teachers	30	37	11	1	1	4.2
	Parents	12	40	13	10	5	3.6
Self confidence among children is enhanced	Teachers	26	43	10	1	0	4.2
	Parents	10	20	29	11	10	3.1
Children develop their own capabilities	Teachers	30	34	11	4	1	4.1
	Parents	20	29	16	10	5	3.6

It is evident from table 2 that within the Montessori environment recognition of child's hidden abilities, self realization of the children, conducive educational environment, sensorial refinement and capabilities were the aspects of internal abilities equally perceived by parents and teachers in agreed responses (range of mean scores from 3.6 to 4.2). In contrast to teachers' perceptions, there were two aspects where parents were found uncertain about the self confidence among children (mean 3.1) and that children learn to create their educational environment (mean 3.2).

Table 3*Parents and Teachers' Perceptions about Behaviors of Children at Montessori Classes*

Statements	Respondents	Responses					Mean Score
		SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	
Willingness to try new things are produced	Teachers	43	27	8	1	1	4.4
	Parents	18	45	14	2	1	4.0
Self creating process of the child is enhanced	Teachers	26	38	12	2	2	4.1
	Parents	20	37	16	5	2	3.9
Practical life skills are generated	Teachers	20	49	8	2	1	4.1
	Parents	14	16	33	13	4	3.3
Selection of best choice is promoted	Teachers	27	36	12	4	1	4.1
	Parents	20	23	21	12	4	3.5
The art of respect for others is matured	Teachers	18	37	20	3	2	3.8
	Parents	14	18	29	14	5	3.3
Manners are learnt by children	Teachers	28	40	12	0	0	4.2
	Parents	22	30	19	5	4	3.8
Communication skills are matured	Teachers	20	43	12	3	2	4.0
	Parents	19	26	19	10	6	3.5
Active involvement of children is enhanced through computer skills	Teachers	23	31	18	5	3	3.8
	Parents	20	25	20	9	6	3.6

Table 3 reflects the responses of parents and teachers towards the behaviors matured among children in Montessori classes. Mean score of both parents and teachers have similar level of agreed perceptions that environment of Montessori classes developed the behavior of children that they were willing to try new things, self creating process was enhanced, selection of best choice was promoted, manners were being learnt, communication skills were being matured and active involvement of children was enhanced through computer skills. There were only two aspects where teachers' claim was not vetted by parents, and so parents were found uncertain in their responses to show that practical life skills were being generated among children and that art of respect for others was being matured in such classes.

Table 4*Parents and Teachers Perception about Skills developed among Children at Montessori Classes*

Statements	Respondents	Responses					Mean Score
		SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	
Child learn through self correcting exploration	Teachers	21	36	16	5	2	3.9
	Parents	22	33	15	6	4	3.8
Independent learning is matured	Teachers	31	34	12	1	2	4.1
	Parents	16	19	24	17	4	3.3
Problem solving skills is produced through Montessori filed of education	Teachers	20	43	12	4	1	4.0
	Parents	28	20	22	8	2	3.8
Creativity among students is generated through project assigned	Teachers	16	45	16	1	2	3.9
	Parents	20	24	20	14	2	3.6
The responsibility to choose their own direction is promoted through Montessori style of learning	Teachers	26	38	10	5	1	4.0
	Parents	14	22	22	17	5	3.3
To chase for best performance is recognized through Montessori education	Teachers	18	43	15	2	2	3.9
	Parents	14	17	24	17	8	3.2
Thinking abilities are enhanced through cognitive development	Teachers	26	36	14	2	2	4.0
	Parents	19	17	23	15	6	3.4

Table 4 reflects the perceptions of parents and teachers about various skills developed among children at Montessori classes. The mean scores calculated lies in agreed responses both for parents and teachers for the aspects of child's learning through self correcting exploration, producing problem solving skills, generating creativity among students. Parents were found uncertain in their responses that independent learning was being matured, developing sense of responsibility to choose own direction, to chase for best performance and that thinking abilities were enhanced among students at Montessori classes.

Teachers claim to inculcate such aspects among students were reported, whereas parents' decline was observed in some cases, in comparative perspectives, parents way of observation is normally given preference being an external evaluator and so their ratings can't be overlooked in this regard.

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings following conclusions were made:-

- Both teachers and parents were satisfied with the learning experiences enabling the children to enhance their knowledge, feeling teachers as facilitators, understanding new experiences and students' interests were kept forth in classes. Parents were found uncertain that application of concepts was being promoted among children. Encouragement for new experiences was claimed to be promoted by teachers, whereas parents showed their uncertain response in this regard. Teachers were found uncertain to declare that child's desire to learn was encouraged whereas parents were found satisfied by this aspect.
- Recognition of child's hidden abilities, self realization of the children, creating an educational environment, sensorial refinement and capabilities were the aspects of internal abilities equally perceived by parents and teachers within the Montessori environment. In contrast to teachers' perceptions, there was one aspect where parents reported lack of self confidence among children. Parents want perfection, they want permanent change, and they want to see their children Mentally, Physically and psychologically fit.
- Both parents and teachers have similar level of perceptions that environment of Montessori classes developed the behavior of children that they were willing to try new things, self creating process was enhanced, selection of best choice was promoted, manners were being learnt, communication skills were being matured and active involvement of children was enhanced through computer skills. There were only two aspects where teachers' claim was not vetted by parents, and so parents were found uncertain in their responses to show that practical life skills were being generated among children and that art of respect for others was being matured in such classes.
- Parents were found uncertain in their responses that independent learning was being matured, developing sense of responsibility to choose own direction, to chase for best performance and that thinking abilities were enhanced among students at Montessori classes.
- Teachers' claim to inculcate such aspects among students were reported, whereas parents' decline was observed in some cases, in comparative perspectives, parents way of observation is normally given preference being an external evaluator and so their ratings can't be overlooked in this regard.

Discussion

This research includes a brief review of the Montessori Method for educating Pre-school age children and criticism on teachers and parents' perceptions about personality and skill development in Montessori system of Education. While identifying the problems being faced by teachers and parents in Montessori School system, each issue explores a wide range of topics, such as retaining kindergarten and elementary students personality, skill and character development, for daily renewal, prepared environment that foster calmness, cooperation and cognitive, social and physical development, exploration of ideas such as new practical life and sensorial Exercises are also included in this research. In good system of education the child's developmental needs a carefully prepared environment which quarantines exposure to materials and experiences. Through this, the child develops intelligence as well as physical and psychological abilities. It is designed to take full advantage of the child's psychological abilities. It is designed to take full advantage of the child's desire to learn and their unique ability to develop their own capabilities. In Montessori system the teacher is supposed to be careful to introduce new materials to the child in little steps that the child can easily master and may feel learning by him without any fear of failure. Parents in this study viewed that application of concepts and trusting new experience among students were not encouraged. Parents argued that student's interests are not captured; hidden capabilities and aspect of fore sighting are not produced in children. Self confidence is the main promises of Montessori Education, whereas parents' perceptions reflected lack of self confidence among children. Reason behind this may be the parents' desire of perfection for their children. The interaction between parents and teachers can generate a good relationship between home and institution to shift Montessori education a great adventure for a child.

Recommendations

In the light of the analysis data and on the basis of findings, following recommendations are made:

- Parents and teachers are two important stakeholders of any educational system; the aspects of Montessori classes where both have satisfaction should be admired through proper recognition to keep the pace smooth and promotion of cooperative dynamics among two major stakeholders of Montessori environment.
- Practical life skills and art of respect should be arranged for building the situation professionally.

- Channels of discussion should be arranged for strengthening the mutual link between teachers and parents. Parents should be considered for their timely feedback about handling of children behavior at Montessori classes.
- For developing thinking abilities among children, careful observation of the child is necessary in order to continually adapt the independent learning environment so that the child may fulfill his greatest potential physically, cognitively, emotionally and spiritually.

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