

Weaknesses and Threats Facing the Realization of the Goals of Isfahan City Preschool Program

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to determine the weaknesses and threats facing the realization of the goals in pre-school courses. It has a descriptive survey research design. The statistical population involves all the principals and trainers in Isfahan pre-school centers in 2012-13. The total number of them was 1550. Through applying the sample size formula, the statistical sample size was estimated to be 280 persons. The above mentioned samples were selected though clustered random sampling proportionate to the volume. In order to collect data, questionnaire and interview were used. The descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the data.

The results of the study indicated that the realization of the goals for pre-school programs is facing some weaknesses and threats. The most important drawback from the standpoint of managers and trainers is the job dissatisfaction of the trainers and the large number of apprentices in the classes. Also, the most important threat was the lack of communication between the colleges of educational sciences and psychology and the pre-school centers and unawareness of the authorities of the importance of pre-school period and lack of support for it and insufficient publicity for the importance of this period in children's life.

Key Words: Pre-school education, Goals, Weakness, Threat

Introduction

The educational systems have played a significant role in survival and conservation of human societies. Traditions and customs, beliefs and values, perspectives and behaviors, knowledge and skills of societies have been transferrable and durable through research and education. In primitive societies, the main education factors included the life of the family, communal work and religious rituals. However, in modern societies the education process starts in families, but officially continues in a private institute; i.e., school. This includes a structured system of education and learning in accordance with a plan and to achieve some pre-determined goals (Saafi, 2011).

The early childhood education in the modern times is rooted in theories by European thinkers such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Montessori, Forebel, Piaget and Dewey. Their

theories are for children of age under 6 and the effect of this period in the following age periods (Abbassi, 2003). They believed that children must not be considered as little adults or adult-like individuals, but must be considered as persons with different abilities and growth characteristics from adults. They often compared children with plants and flowers; that is, they considered them as living organisms that require care and support to be flourished and turn into some mature and free individuals. Much efforts and research by these famous scientists are indicative of the fact that the initial experiences by a child and the success obtained in this period will greatly affect the personality and his ultimate accomplishment. What a child learns in his early 6 years of life will be the basis for his learning in his future (Sepassi, Shahni Yeylagh and Bagheri, 2009).

The recent scripts about children's growth and primary training suggest that no correct definition of early childhood education has been achieved yet (Rauou, 2004). Pre-school education starts from the time of birth and continues to the first official class at the elementary school; that is, the finish of the 6th year of the child. Education in this period is a general lawful and targeted training for children of age below 6, based on their characteristics and level of progress, by providing an environment full of motivation. In this process, the physical, mental, emotional and social progress of the children must be directed best in the direction of the society's cultural values (Mofidi, 2012).

Today, more than any other time, the importance of pre-school education has become clear and in a spectrum of university majors has become the focus of research and study. Majors such as: psychoanalysis, psychology of growth, educational research, economics of education and sociology of education. All these groups have been focusing on a common educational subject in the early childhood period, because they all believe that early education has an important effect on the child's growth and their future performance (Spiess, 2009).

Today, the expectations of the societies from pre-school programs and their teachers, planners, and administrators have increased. It is expected that they prepare children for academic success by achieving their goals and raise them as sociable members of the society and be adaptable to their cultures. They teach them to overcome their environmental deprivation and utilize their emotional talents to face different situations and be a good problem solver and creative person (Mofidi, 1390).

The necessity for establishing some pre-school learning centers and the many academic and scientific reasons in being beneficial for children reminds us of some very important goals (Zare and Ghoshoni, 2008). The main goal for pre-school education is to provide some environmental and educational conditions for developing children's personality in physical, emotional, mental, social/moral dimensions. This can be achieved through some fundamentally sound planning and be effective in the children's academic progress in various school subjects (Sepasi, Shahni Yeilagh and Bagheri, 2009). The success achieved in the pre-school period and its positive results in the following stages of their academic life are all due to the fulfillment of the goals in this course. In fact, if we pass the pre-school course with success and the growth goals and expectations of this period are all achieved, then it can affect on the following stages with success.

Since education is traditionally considered as a process, there are a number of linked factors and stages that will affect on the fulfillment of its goals, quantitatively and

qualitatively. To achieve the goals of a pre-school education program, we must first think thoroughly about them, and identify the ways to achieve them and consider the potential obstacles on its way (Azani and Mardani, 2009).

The fulfillment of the pre-school programs will always face some obstacles for reaching their set goals. We can generally divide them into two main groups: The first are those related to the internal environment of the educational institute. These obstacles can be due to some educational factors such as the instructor, the principal, the educational contents, the teaching methods, the assessment and educational spaces and devices in connection to each other. Insufficient or lack of any of these factors can make the achievement of the goals difficult or impossible (Salimi, 1996). These factors will be indicative of the existing weakness.

The second set of challenges is related to the external environment of the educational institutes. They include factors like, social, cultural and political perspectives. By studying the outside environment, they try to find the external effective factors on the educational systems. This is done because the external environment is always interacting with the internal environment and has many effects on achievement of the goals (Khalili, 2003).

Nelson and Macleond (2003) during a study in this field declared that by participating in high quality educational programs and achieving the set goals will have positive effects on the oral and verbal skills of the students in the following stages. Taggart (2005) studied the growth of 3000 children aged between 3 and 7 in different pre-school education centers in a 5-year-time project. He reached some reasonable results for the benefits of attending children in pre-school education centers and their results on their social, behavioral and language growth between the ages of 3 and 5.

R. Textor (2002) concluded that only one third of the day-time institutes for children deserve to receive good grades and children who go to these nursery schools are one year ahead of their peers. Parker (2005) in a research project for studying the effectiveness of the pre-school teachings in helping children concluded that if the pre-school education is performed by experienced and well-trained teachers and administrators, then it will result in substantial academic growth in the first grade students.

Gulbayrak (2004) in a study showed that the playgrounds in the pre-school centers are not in an acceptable level of standard and safety and need some more attention. Michelle (2008) in a study noticed that pre-school education has immense positive results for the children, family and the society as a whole. The long term advantages of such education are the result of a high level of quality by such educational programs. The term "quality" in pre-school programs includes the development of pre-school academic standards for children, informed education using suitable educational programs, the child development, teachers training and the professional advancement of the educational staff.

Meidani Pour (2001), in a study concluded that the pre-school educational centers have not paid any attention to the goals and educational programs for the children's development. Most of these centers are relying on lectures as the main method for teaching. In terms of using the educational equipment, only a small percentage of the centers used them. The principals, teachers and teacher assistants were of low educational level and knowledge.

Khalooei (2004) in his dissertation titled “the child’s nest” studied the spaces provided by the nursery schools and concluded that the physical space of these centers are not in a desirable and standard level. Abdollahi (2005) in his dissertation concluded are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the children’s emotional, physical, cognitive and social characteristics.

Hajizadeh (2006) in a study concluded that facilities of the nursery schools in Kerman county are not of the proper standard, quality and quantity-wise. Zare and Ghosoni (2008) declared that the physical space in pre-school educational centers is not appropriate for educational purposes. It can be said that almost all of the pre-school educational centers are facing human resource problems. Supervising the pre-school educational centers is very weak, especially in those managed by the public welfare office. In addition, there is no job security in those centers managed by the public welfare office.

Pishghadam and Tabatabaian (2009) found out that the nursery schools have no suitable space for education and the trainers have no codified plan for teaching English, and have no proper qualification for teaching and do not pay attention to the emotional, cognitive and social needs of the children. Ghorbani (2010) in a study showed that there are a large number of problems in the pre-school programs of Iran. These problems include: the large number of children attending the program, lack of proper civil trainings, lack of modern and persistent training for the teachers, lack of an appropriate assessment system, shortage of qualified people, lack of organization and structure. Fatahi (2012) reached the following conclusion that in pre-school centers in Iran the majority of the teachers do not have any university degree. In addition, the facilities for teachers in the private centers are in low supply and this makes them unmotivated. The government provides a very small amount of funds in the educational system.

Today, it is imperative to consider the importance of fulfilling the educational goals of pre-school education, more than any time before. This leads to the fact that more investment in education will result in higher quality success for children who attend in pre-school programs (Kaul, 2012). The current study is conducted to determine the weaknesses and threats facing the fulfillment of the goals by the pre-school programs. In fact, the findings of this study can help planners, managers, teachers and parents of the children to become familiar with the goals and expectations of this program and in case any obstacles, problems or negative factors are encountered, they can identify and resolve them. Finally, by going through this important stage with success, we can witness its positive effects in the following stages.

The current study is to find answers to the following questions in order to achieve success in reaching the goals set by the pre-school program in the fields of cognitive, emotional, physical-motor and social:

1. What are the weaknesses facing the pre-school programs in the city of Isfahan?
2. What is the extent of weaknesses of the goals by the pre-school program in Isfahan?
3. What are the threats to the realization of the pre-school program goals in Isfahan?
4. What is the extent of threats to the realization of the goals by the pre-school program in Isfahan?

Research Method

The research method undertaken is descriptive-measuring and applied. The statistical population of the study includes all the principals and teachers of the pre-school training centers of the city of Isfahan in 2012-2013 school years. Their population consisted of 311 principals and 1244 teachers. To collect data, a combined method consisting of interview and questionnaire was used. The basis for designing the questionnaire was the analysis of the interviews given to the principals and teachers of the pre-school centers.

The questionnaire consisted of two components of weaknesses (9 questions) and threats (17 questions) and graded on the 5-scale Likert spectrum from very low (1) to very high (5). The final index of the questionnaire was measured using the Cronbach Alpha method to be equal to 0.82.

To analyze the data using the descriptive statistics, the mean and standard deviation were used, and using the inferential statistics, the single-variable T-Test and Friedman ranking test were used.

Findings

1. What are the weaknesses facing the pre-school programs in the city of Isfahan?

| # | How do you assess the pre-school condition considering the current situation in educational system? | Mean | S.D. | T-Value | Degree of Freedom | Significance Level | Ranking Mean | Ranking |
|---|---|------|------|---------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 | To what extent the teachers and trainers are educated in educational sciences and child psychology courses? | 2.28 | 0.76 | -15.702 | 276 | 0.001 | 4.47 | 3 rd |
| 2 | To what extent the new methods and technologies are used? | 2.72 | 0.77 | -5.868 | 276 | 0.001 | 5.76 | |
| 3 | To what extent the facilities offered by the pre-school centers sufficient and of high quality? | 2.96 | 0.85 | -0.775 | 276 | 0.439 | 6.32 | |
| 4 | To what extent the teachers use the existing facilities? | 2.62 | 0.78 | -7.869 | 276 | 0.001 | 5.48 | |
| 5 | To what extent the teachers are satisfied with their jobs? | 1.93 | 0.68 | -25.944 | 276 | 0.001 | 3.43 | 1 st |
| 6 | To what extent the number of children in the classrooms is appropriate? | 2.18 | 0.72 | -18.701 | 276 | 0.001 | 4.24 | 2 nd |
| 7 | To what extent the education in each district is in accordance to their needs? | 2.41 | 0.80 | -12.065 | 276 | 0.001 | 4.91 | |
| 8 | To what extent the principals are familiar with different management systems? | 2.73 | 0.92 | -4.786 | 276 | 0.001 | 5.59 | |
| 9 | To what extent the pre-school centers are in good physical conditions? | 2.47 | 0.78 | -11.209 | 276 | 0.001 | 4.80 | |

Table 1 – Mean, Standard deviation, T-value and ranking mean of the weaknesses

The findings in table 1 show the weak points of the program in Isfahan to be the 5th question; i.e., “the dissatisfaction of the teachers of their jobs” with mean ranking of 3.43, the 6th question; i.e., “the high number of children in the pre-school centers classes” with mean ranking of 4.24, and the 1st question; i.e., “lack of relation between the educational degree of the teacher” with mean ranking of 4.47 which showed the lowest mean ranking and this can be the most serious problem in the respondents’ view.

2. What is the extent of weaknesses in the realization of the goals by the pre-school program in Isfahan?

| Group | Mean | S.D. | Mean S.D. | T | Degree of Freedom | Significance level |
|---------|------|------|-----------|--------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Isfahan | 2.48 | 0.30 | 0.018 | 24.487 | 275 | 0.001 |

Table 2 – the average scores of the weakness points facing the realization of the goals set by pre-school programs in the city of Isfahan with an imaginary mean of 3

Based on the findings in table 2, the average scores of the weakness points facing the realization of the goals set by pre-school programs in the city of Isfahan is 2.48 which is lower than the imaginary mean of 3. The significance level is equal to 0.001 and this value is lower than 0.01, so the statistical difference seen is in 99% significance level. Therefore, the goals with the pre-school program are facing the weaknesses mentioned.

3. What are the threats to the realization of the pre-school program goals in Isfahan?

| # | How do you assess the pre-school condition considering the current situation in educational system? | Mean | S.D. | T-Value | Degree of Freedom | Significance Level | Ranking Mean | Ranking |
|----|---|------|------|---------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 10 | To what extent there is a constructive relationship between the teacher and the students? | 2/70 | 0/92 | -5/249 | 276 | 0/001 | 12/95 | |
| 11 | To what extent the teaching by parents at home is reinforced at school? | 1/98 | 0/68 | -24/423 | 276 | 0/001 | 9/54 | |
| 12 | To what extent do the administrators are aware of the importance of the pre-school education? | 1/44 | 0/52 | -49/077 | 276 | 0/001 | 6/27 | 3 rd |
| 13 | How easy is it for the pre-school centers to use the sport and educational facilities of the city? | 2/50 | 0/68 | -12/117 | 276 | 0/001 | 12/49 | |
| 14 | To what extent the expectations of the teachers are met by the principals and higher authorities? | 1/49 | 0/56 | -44/675 | 276 | 0/001 | 6/45 | |
| 15 | To what extent are suitable educational resources and contents prepared and provided for teachers and students? | 2/73 | 0/85 | -5/156 | 276 | 0/001 | 13/16 | |
| 16 | To what extent is the number of graduates from supplementary education in pre-school education sufficient? | 1/46 | 0/56 | -45/628 | 276 | 0/001 | 6/35 | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|------|------|---------|-----|-------|-------|-----------------|
| 17 | To what extent is there enough information about the necessity of this program? | 1/31 | 0/52 | -53/835 | 276 | 0/001 | 5/45 | 2 nd |
| 18 | To what extent is there a constructive relation between the colleges of educational sciences and psychology and the pre-school education centers? | 1/29 | 0/53 | -53/441 | 276 | 0/001 | 5/25 | 1 st |
| 19 | To what extent are the results of the studies by the administration office of pre-school education applied? | 1/74 | 0/81 | -25/874 | 276 | 0/001 | 7/86 | |
| 20 | How aware are the parents of the importance of pre-school education? | 2/19 | 0/79 | -16/700 | 276 | 0/001 | 10/80 | |
| 21 | To what extent is the employment situation of the teacher and personnel in pre-school centers suitable? | 1/88 | 0/67 | -27/224 | 276 | 0/001 | 9/12 | |
| 22 | How well are the principals and teachers familiar with pre-school laws and regulations? | 2/47 | 0/75 | -11/550 | 276 | 0/001 | 12/16 | |
| 23 | How financially well-off are the pre-school centers? | 2/49 | 0/68 | -12/293 | 276 | 0/001 | 12/36 | |
| 24 | How sufficient is the research funds for pre-school education? | 1/78 | 0/70 | -28/506 | 276 | 0/001 | 8/45 | |
| 25 | To what extent do universities participate in holding teacher training courses? | 1/64 | 0/67 | -33/123 | 276 | 0/001 | 7/58 | |
| 26 | To what extent does the government support pre-school students and pre-school centers? | 1/51 | 0/62 | -39/539 | 276 | 0/001 | 6/75 | |

Table 3 – The distribution and percentage of plentitude for threat questions

The findings by table 3 show that the question related to threat in Isfahan with the lowest ranking mean is the question 18; i.e., “lack of constructive relation between the colleges of educational sciences and psychology and the pre-school education centers” with ranking mean of 5.25. the lowness of this question ranking mean shows the intensity of the threat. Question 17 “insufficient information about the necessity of this program” with mean ranking of 5.45 is in the second place and question 12 “lack of awareness of the importance of pre-school program by the authorities” with a ranking mean of 6.27 is in the third place with respect to the most important threats.

4. What is the extent of threats to the realization of the goals by the pre-school program in Isfahan?

| Group | Mean | S.D. | Mean S.D. | T | Degree of Freedom | Significance level |
|---------|------|------|-----------|--------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Isfahan | 1.92 | 0.28 | 0.017 | 63.211 | 274 | 0.001 |

Table 4 – the average score of the role by obstacles threatening the realization of pre-school goals in Isfahan with imaginary mean of 3

Based on the findings in table 4, the average score of the role by obstacles threatening the realization of pre-school goals in Isfahan is 1.92, which is lower than the imaginary mean of 3. The significance level is equal to 0.001, and because this is lower than 0.01, the statistical difference observed is in 99% in significance level. Therefore, the pre-school program goals are facing threats.

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of this research is to study the weaknesses and threats facing the realization of the pre-school goals in the city of Isfahan. The obtained results from the analysis of research data showed that the realization of goals in pre-school education is facing the weaknesses and threats mentioned. The average score of weaknesses and threats is lower than the imaginary mean of 3. This result shows that principals and teachers have assessed the current pre-school education conditions lower than normal and this is sign of threat and weakness.

The most important weaknesses in the view of principals and teachers are the dissatisfaction of the teachers of their jobs, the high number of students in pre-school centers and lack of any relation between the teachers' subject of study and their teaching course. In addition, the most important threats in their view are the insufficient relationship between the colleges of educational sciences and psychology and the pre-school education centers, insufficient information about the necessity of pre-school education and unawareness of the authorities of the importance of pre-school education.

The results of this study are in agreement with those by Attarpour (1983), Rami (2000), Nazari (2001), Meidani pour (2001), Abdollahi (2005), Hajizadeh (2006), Zare and Ghoshoni (2008), Fatahi (2012), Pishghadam and Tabatabaian (2009), Khaloi (2005), Gorbani (2010) domestically and by the studies done by Textor (2002) and Gulbayrak (2004) abroad.

In explaining the results of this study, we must mention that the weaknesses are mostly related to the internal conditions of the pre-school centers. The weaknesses can come under control because they are among the internal organizational factors. Identifying the weaknesses cause us to become aware of the existing problems and shortcomings and resolve them to achieve our goals. Skills and abilities of the teachers, the principals, students, financial resources, and physical resources are among the factors that can display themselves as weakness, if not in good conditions. This in turn will have negative effects on the quality of education. These weaknesses and problems can be due to the threats outside of the pre-school centers that gradually have penetrated the pre-school centers and have turned into some internal organizational weaknesses. The threats related to the shortcomings, lack of attentions, and inadequacies may exist outside of the education system which can leave undesirable effects on the goals of this course. Because threats are from the outside sources, they are out of our control. We can only rely on our this study showed that the majority of the threats are related to the way parents, authorities and university scholars and social support view the pre-school education. The kind of view by these entities can result in low

assessment of pre-school education and lack of proper support by the people in charge and consequently, a low attention to the hardworking teachers.

Unfortunately, the pre-school education has not found its proper station in our country. This must make us very concern. If we do not pay proper attention to the education of the child in his most important years of his life, he will face many problems in the upcoming years of his life. Thus, childhood education must be taken more seriously in the education system of our country. Unfortunately, the pre-school education has not been supported by the government like other academic periods and has not received any funds. As a result, the pre-school education has faced a low reception by the private and public sectors in Iran, and this has resulted in low quality education for pre-school children. The pre-school education has been in deep crisis in the recent years compared with other periods of education due to the lack of funding for this period and some have even made some attempts to eliminate this period of education all together. There has been some limited efforts by the ministry of education since 1983 to keep this program alive. The attention by the authorities for the goals of this program and taking the matter seriously for preparing children for entering elementary school and some financial and psychological support for it can help treat some of the organizational problems of this program.

Based on the conclusions made by this study, it is suggested:

1. To improve the skills and abilities of the pre-school teachers and principals, some short term training courses and workshops must be designed, planned and implemented.
2. To get parents' support and participation in children's education, there must be some courses and publications designed for the parents and to give them awareness about the importance of pre-school education and the role of parents in achieving the goals of this program.
3. Along with during work courses, some publications and educational pamphlets for pre-school teachers and principals be published to give them the knowledge about better use of the technology and educational facilities, the methods for spatial design, teaching methods, to provide appropriate opportunities for learning and a constant method for assessing students.
4. It is suggested that for increasing the job security and job satisfaction of the teachers of this program to increase their salary, benefits, position, insurance and the job ranking of the pre-school teachers and to provide other facilities for the teachers.
5. We recommend to the specialists and authorities in this area to consider a change of perspective by the public and private authorities on pre-school education program.

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