

Early Childhood Care and Education (3-6 Years) and the Role of Traditional Games: An Exploratory Study of Jammu and Kashmir

ABSTRACT

Education is a lifelong endeavour that starts in the womb and lasts until death. It helps the individual to develop full potential by allowing to control the environment of his/her own successful life and living. The foundation of education begins in one's very early childhood and lays the foundation for later stages of educational progression. Nowadays, a growing number of children in early childhood spend a great deal of time in playing electronic games rather than traditional games (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). Parents and educators are concerned about the current trend because they strongly believe that traditional child games develop more skills than modern electronic or video games. A traditional game can be beneficial in all aspects of early childhood development, including physical or motor, social-emotional, moral, cognitive, and linguistic development. The present study aims at illustrating the importance of traditional Kashmiri games in ensuring the balanced development of children's personalities. The results showed that traditional games can have a positive effect on children's motor, linguistic, cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Care, Education & Traditional games.

INTRODUCTION

When a new paradigm is created or a structure is replaced, there are always a few prerequisites that must be satisfied to allow the new system to work effectively and produce the desired results. The New Education Policy (2020) seems very promising, and it is actually the need of the hour. Implementing such a policy has been a dream for many years, but it represents a paradigm shift. It is clear that the present government has accepted the challenge and came up with such positive changes in the policy that are indeed beneficial and in line with the current requirements of the country and its people. It is the first policy of its kind that differs somewhat from the existing colonial-type education system. But these changes will bring with them a lot of challenges as well. For this policy to be a success and produce the intended outcomes, some prerequisites need to be met (NEP, 2020). The developmental and contextual needs should determine the ECCE programme, ensuring that inputs and environments are tailored to children's needs. Due to the need for an individualized approach, it was felt that a common 'curriculum' would be inappropriate for all (Kaul & Sankar, 2009). Over the years, however, it has become apparent that ECCE programs in practice differ considerably and most of them do not offer developmentally appropriate programs for young children (McMorris, 1998). Due to a lack of a curriculum framework, the vacuum in the curriculum has been filled either with a minimalist program or by extending the primary stage curriculum downward, resulting in overburdening the child, which can negatively impact the child's ability to learn (Currie, 2001). As part of the

National ECCE Policy, the Ministry of Education is committed to promoting and nurturing the holistic development of children under the age of six, as well as laying foundations and realizing the full potential of children by providing them with free, universal, equitable, inclusive, joyful, and culturally-contextualized resources (NEP, 2020). In our vision for the Indian child, we reflect our opinions and beliefs about childhood and what makes a good life possible at a personal and societal level. The quality education aims to develop children who are happy, healthy, and confident; who are confident in themselves, based on their abilities and strengths; and who are respectful of their social, linguistic, and cultural heritage. When children grow and learn, they expand their horizons, engage in inquiry, discover new things, and apply their knowledge to become lifelong learners (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2013).

Play has been a crucial part of childhood since thousands of years ago. It teaches children about life and the world around them. Therefore, one can say human history is sprinkled with games. Games contribute significantly to the development of children at every stage. Games can be defined (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016) as “an activity that is performed for the purpose of amusement or enjoyment.” Games are very important for children's development as they contribute to their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being (Scarlett, 2004). Children today are accustomed to gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops because of technological advancements. On average, children spend about eight hours watching electronic screens a day, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Suparno, 2018). In comparison to modern electronic games, traditional games are better at improving a variety of life skills (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). Electronic games are more popular today than traditional games among children. Educationists and parents worry about this trend because they believe traditional child games develop a wide spectrum of skills better than online ones. In comparison, traditional games contribute significantly to the development of children's health, whereas modern games serve merely as a way to time pass and to make children lazy. In addition, children are becoming addicted to modern electronic games because they play them too frequently. Due to this addiction, children tend not to interact with the environment since they are too absorbed in playing online games (Scarlett, 2004). This may be dangerous for their mental health. Therefore, traditional games are better for children's overall development than modern games, but to make them more enjoyable, some modern changes are required so that they are more enjoyable and make the children's mind and body fresh (Suparno, 2018).

Traditional games can be used as a learning tool to help children develop their cognitive, language, emotional, social, and physical abilities as well. Through traditional games, one can develop physical activity as well as cognitive and social skills. Fauzi's (2016) research showed that Cim-Ciman games are not only capable of training motor, language, cognitive, social, and moral development, but they can also be used to build individual character and install cultural values (Cherry, 2012). It will be enormously beneficial if every traditional game can be incorporated into the core curriculum not only as an attachment (Cherry, 2012). In addition to meeting the developmental needs of young children, we should also include traditional games as

an effort to preserve culture. As we all know, traditional games are one of the nation's cultural treasures, but they have been abandoned over time and largely forgotten by the community.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

ECCE has become more important since NEP-2020 was introduced. Schools will now provide early childhood care and education, replacing ICDS centers. Children's first learning experiences take place in early childhood. The research in early childhood education shows that over 85% of the child's cumulative brain development occurs before the age of six, underscoring the importance of research in ECCE (NEP, 2020). By analyzing the findings of this study, educators, policymakers, and pre-primary teachers will be better able to understand the importance of low-cost / no-cost teaching techniques based on traditional games for early childhood education. In this study, we tried to identify the different low-cost no-cost traditional play activities. It is important to preserve the traditional games that the ancestor passed down to us because they hold valuable local wisdom values, the 'good', 'positive', 'worth', and 'desirable' values. The majority of children today prefer to play modern games over traditional ones. Traditional games are usually played on large fields or in vast spaces, whereas modern games are typically played on electronic devices such as computers and smartphones. Modern electronic games lead to addiction in children because they are too often played. Due to this addiction, children do not want to interact with the environment. This is clearly harmful to their mental and physical health. Kashmiri traditional games include Hopscotch (Saz Loung), Garam (Santooli), Tanga ya chout (Marbles), Chourei Tchape (Hide and seek), Gilli Danda, Hukus Bukus, Aario Mario Taario Tich toss game, Kho kho, Kabadi, Ready Ready and Tuli Langun etc. These games can be used as teaching techniques at early childhood period for holistic development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To highlight the importance of traditional games for early childhood care and education in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To identify the traditional games of Jammu and Kashmir and to link them to the balanced development of a child's personality.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based primarily on secondary data. The main data sources were books, personal sources, journal articles, newspapers, websites, government records, etc. The secondary data were analyzed qualitatively by the researcher.

ANALYSIS / RESULTS:

It is important that all children be treated equally regardless of their level of abilities and disabilities. The demand for the same treatment is very crucial during the early stages of a child's life due to the nature of their development. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children's rights of survival, protection, development, and participation must be respected. All children should be brought under the umbrella of ECCE, wherein their concerns should be equally addressed. The NECCEP (2013) aimed to enhance the development of all children, including those with disabilities, through the provision of quality inputs, such as care, health, nutrition, and an environment conducive to development. A child is like an uncut diamond, which any teacher can shape into any design. Design is heavily influenced by the techniques and skills of teachers. Hence, the teacher must handle the Child with utmost care so that he or she can discover the greater meaning and purpose of life. In human life, early childhood is a crucial time for harmonious development that shapes up the minds (Calman & Whelan, 2005).

1. Importance of Traditional Games for Early Childhood Care and Education:

A child is an individual with unique skills and abilities that can be enhanced and developed further. Therefore, one of the main goals of providing quality care and education during the early years is to allow the child to develop holistically and to reach his/her full potential in all areas of development (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982). As parents, we quite often lament when we see our children glued to the TV or their phones. While observing a generation of children enjoying technology and gadgets, we cannot help thinking back on games of the past. It was these traditional games that occupied most of our time after school. Quite literally, they kept us on our toes, running around quiet streets or terraces. They taught us about teamwork and friendship (Gomme, 1894).

The children learn best by playing and doing, according to the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme. They have an insatiable curiosity for exploring the world around them through their senses. A child is constantly in interaction with his or her environment, and he or she wants to touch everything. To them, playing is the biggest priority. Furthermore, young children learn by experiencing and actively participating in the learning process. Play-based learning should therefore be a core component of the ECCE curriculum, in which learning processes are influenced by the interests, abilities, and social contexts of students.

Sports and games should be an integral part of a child's routine and curriculum. Sports build physical strength and mental stamina. Traditional games, on the other hand, are characterized by an ad hoc nature. These games do not need expensive infrastructure or specialized coaches. Although some games, such as kabaddi and kho kho, do have international tournaments, the rest are largely localized. It is the accessibility and ease of play that give them their flavor (McMorris, 1998).

Traditional Games help children learn social rules and ethics more easily. They learn social rules such as respecting others, protecting their rights, and helping other people. They also learn how to make a decision and then apply it, as well as how to cooperate with each other. In addition, the

activities during the games stimulate the small muscles like fingers and hands, as well as the big muscles like the arms and legs. Playing traditional physical games (running, jumping, climbing, etc.) helps children's breathing, circulation, digestion, and excretory systems work regularly and contributes to their development. Traditional games encourage cognitive, language, motor, social, and emotional development as they teach the necessary skills and behaviors for survival (Suparno, 2018).

Traditional games can be used as a learning tool and contribute to productive school time by combining fun with learning. Since these games are naturally student-centered, they should be prepared by students. They will work harder and more willingly when they are engaged and interested than in the traditional classroom activities. When the teacher sets up the goals and rules, most students will follow them without further explanation, and the teacher can monitor and assist the students. We must now revive Kashmir's traditional games with new vigor. In urban areas, they have almost disappeared, and they are rarely played in rural areas. At the pre-primary level, these traditional games can be used as 'no cost, low cost' teaching techniques for developing balanced personalities (Pen and Freedom, 2012).

2. Identification of Traditional Games of Jammu and Kashmir

Games from the past will always be enjoyed by children as long as they learn how to play them. Furthermore, these games can be very beneficial to them because they require physical activity, social skills, creativity, imagination, competition, camaraderie, and many other benefits (KNS, 2021). The present study identified the following traditional games for ECCE:

- 1. Kabaddi:** I would like to begin with one of the most well-known games in Kashmir. A game that does not require any equipment and relies on strength and strategy alone. Two teams play this game, which involves a single player at each team trying to break through to the opponent's territory. In order to reach the line, the player must touch as many players as possible from the opposing team. This is done while singing kabaddi. The game certainly keeps you on the edge of your seat (Pen and Freedom, 2012).
- 2. Kho-kho:** It is also a team sport, but is particularly popular in schools. As the first team sits in alternate directions, the other team runs around them. The goal is for the sitting team to catch as many runners as it can. It's a sport that requires strategic thinking. The game begins when a player from the team sitting touches his teammate to continue the chase (KNS, 2021).
- 3. Hopscotch / Saz Loung:** Hopscotch, also known as Saz Loung, is one of the traditional games played by both men and women. In this game, you make a rectangular box on the floor with six small boxes named Awal, Doum, Soum, Jaanat, Samandar, and Jehnum. On the upper side of the huge rectangular box called a Queen, Dullej, or Batta is drawn a box of comparatively smaller size. It can be played in teams or individually. To begin the game, players throw a small piece either a wooden box or shoe polish box filled with mud into the first box. This player has to cross the box without touching the boundaries with only one leg, while the other leg hangs in midair. Once the player has grabbed all six

boxes, he or she needs to aim for Doluej and throw the piece into it. In the end, he/she should throw the wooden piece over his/her head to conquer the boxes with his/her back facing them. The team or player who wins the most boxes is declared the winner (Kashmir Box, 2019).

4. **Gilli Danda / Latkinj Lotte:** A Gilli Danda game is similar to baseball and cricket. In Kashmir, it was once as popular as cricket. You just need two sticks of different sizes. You just need two sticks of different sizes. The player must hit the Gilli with the Danda as far as possible while it's in the air. In addition, the player must run to a pre-determined point before the opponent can grab the Gilli. This game can be played by many people simultaneously.
5. **Garam / Santooli:** It is basically seven stones that makeup Santooli/Garam. The practice originated in Kashmir and has spread around India. A ball and seven stones are used. Players are divided into two teams. A member of the attacking team needs to strike the pile of stones with the ball three times to knock them over. After that, the entire team must rebuild the pile before being hit by the ball and declared out (Kashmir Box, 2019).
6. **Joutas:** A popular outdoor game for both sexes. One player is blindfolded with a piece of cloth while the other players poke fun at him/her, push and pull his clothes and run around him/her. If the blindfolded person holds onto any of them, the positions are exchanged. Elders believe that this game requires more focus and concentration.
7. **Chourei Tchape (Hide and seek):** It is unclear where this game comes from. Many people around India play it under different names. Players hide in an area that has been predetermined. The 'denner' must close his eyes and announce loudly the numbers while the other players hide. Afterward, the denner must find the hidden players. This game can be played by any number of people (Pen and Freedom, 2012).
8. **Tanga ya chout (Marbles):** Mostly boys played this game with small round pieces of designed glass called bante. Players used to dig a hole in the ground and throw these bantes into it. This game was also played either in teams or individually. The team that would throw successfully all the round pieces of glass in the hole was declared the winner. They would also win these round-designed glass pieces by striking them by the fingertips.
9. **Hukus Bukus:** It was a favorite indoor game among children. Hukus bukus is a popular rhyme in itself." *"hukus bukus telli wann chekus , onum batta lodum deag,, shaal kich kich waangano,, Brahmi charas puane chhokum, Brahmish batanye tekhis tyakha."* (KNS, 2021)
10. **Aario Mario Taario Tich:** Among all the hand toss games, Aario mario taario tich was the most popular. It involved players putting their hands together, flipping them over, showing either the palm side or the dorsal side. Whoever makes an odd turn wins the toss.
11. **Tuli Langun:** The game was played both outdoors and indoors. In this game, players tug on each other's backs while their arms twitched in opposite directions. They would chant Tulaay langur tulaan chas, makhdoom seabun kachan chaass during this game.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order to teach cultural values and identity to children, it is important to use traditional children's games. These games should be applied to the teaching and learning process in the early childhood period. Educators should develop a model for free learning that involves traditional games (Yucel & Elcin, 2015).. Because children's optimal development occurs primarily through play. Below are some important ways in which children can learn through traditional play activities:

- As children play traditional games, they develop skills in all four areas of development: cognitive, physical, communication, and social/emotional. These skills are practiced and reinforced in a way that is impossible with worksheets or modern video games.
- Through playing traditional games, children can be encouraged to develop healthy habits. these thus can help children to combat issues such as childhood obesity, useless fear, emotional instability, etc. A child's play is a natural stress reliever and safe outlet for dealing with anxiety and fears.
- The act of playing provides children with an opportunity to discover new ideas, make meaningful connections between their experiences and their active investigations.
- Children begin to recognize the connection between their choices and their natural consequences while playing.
- Children who play develop self-control, which is crucial to their later success. While playing, they are trying to understand the world around them. Play provides them with opportunities to regulate their feelings, delay gratification, and negotiate with others, all essential for self-control, a 21st-century skill.
- When children play, they are trying to understand the world around them. They develop mental flexibility and their imagination is enhanced.
- During play, children can develop mindfulness and feel safe to try out new ideas and experiment. When they are engaged in play suspend their awareness of time and space, becoming fully present in the task at hand.

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