



A Comparative Study of Soft Skills in Rural and Urban Preschoolers

Poonam Rani*, Bimla Dhanda and Nomita Punia
Human Development and Family Studies, CCS HAU, Hisar, India
poonam.saharan3@gmail.com

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Abstract

Soft skills encompass a range of interpersonal skills such as courtesy, respect for other, self-discipline, self-confidence, conformity to norms, language proficiency, and behaviour and communication skills. Soft skills including effective communication, social, professional ethics, problem solving, decision-making, and organizational skills are needed in adventure education to enhance the learning of children. The study was conducted in rural and urban areas of district Hisar. Two villages namely Balsamand and Kharia were taken as rural location and for urban the Hisar city was selected for collection of data. A total number of 200 children of age group of 3+, 4+ and 5+ years were taken, out of which 100 children were found from urban and 100 from rural areas. Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scale by Sparrow et al. was used to test the communicational and adaptive skills of children. Result revealed that children had increasing trend for soft and social skills with increase their age. Comparison over location shown that mean performance of children on soft skills were significantly different over the locations of boys and girls during the age 3+ to 5+ years.

Keywords: Soft skills, preschoolers, behavior, personal, socio-economic variables.

Introduction

The first five years of life are crucial for physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language development of the child. During this stage child is just like a wet cement whatever falls on it, makes an impression. Therefore child's ability to acquire many skills depend upon the opportunities available to him during this stage.

The importance of stimulating environment during this most plastic and impressionable stage cannot be overlooked. "Better the experience given, richer is the dividend". With the perpetual growth of the Indian economy, the importance of soft skills and technical skills in India has increased tremendously over the years. Children's future earning power is increasingly likely to be determined by whether or not they possess these soft skills, rather than just their exam results. Children are the future of the nation; they have to learn certain fundamentals such as security, association, belonging, dignity, hope, power, enjoyment and competence in the preschool classroom. These fundamentals are called "soft skills". When we focus on changes in respect to parents – rather than siblings or other persons in the household – as parents are first and foremost those capable of assisting their children to acquire non-cognitive skills¹.

Soft skills cannot be taught in a vacuum; rather, they must be introduced, developed, refined, practiced, and reinforced through education starting from nursery schools. The evidence suggests that the development of soft skills in early childhood programs is the key to their long-term effects on adult

earnings and country economies². Soft skills are not inherent or permanent rather they can be developed and enhanced over a period of time. Judy and Arthur³ stated that parents are with strong values, integrity and positive attitude, can inculcate in their children a set of solid values like fairness, honesty, discipline, justice and integrity right from their childhood. The need for ten soft skills in children and also focused on the importance of culture-bound soft skills on children⁴.

The critical time for nurturing soft skills is when brain development is at its peak, before the age of six (Heckman⁵). Soft skills are intuitive, but if they are not, that they can be taught, learned, and appropriately applied⁶. Cunha and Heckman⁷ found that parental investments, such as the number of books at home and frequency of trips to museums, have strong effects on cognitive skills at earlier ages and have strong effects on non cognitive skill formation at later ages.

Research suggested that soft skills are just as good an indicator of job performance as traditional job qualifications or hard skills. Study conducted by Harvard University, and the Stanford Research Institute has shown that technical skills and knowledge account for about 15 percent of the reason an individual gets a job, remaining 85 percent of job success is based on individual's soft skills⁸.

In view of this, the present study was undertaken with the following objectives: i. To compare the soft skills of rural and urban preschoolers.

Methodology

The methodological research procedures adopted in conducting present investigation are given under the following heads:

Locale of the Study: The study was conducted at two locations selected purposefully, viz., urban and rural. Hisar city was selected as urban location in Haryana state, and for rural location, two villages namely Balsmand and Kharia were taken for collection of data. From Hisar city, preschool labs of children were visited for data collection.

Selection of Respondents: A total of 200 children in three age groups, namely, 3, 4 and 5 years were selected from urban and rural areas which were further divided over the age groups and gender, namely, 100 from rural and urban areas.

Variables and their Measurements: Two types of variables namely dependent and independent variables were included in the investigation. Variables used for the study have been given in this section along with their operational definition and measurement procedures.

Dependent variables: Soft skills include Adaptive, Communicational and Social skills were the dependent variables.

Independent variables: i. Personal variables: - age, gender of the respondents in the following study. ii. Socio-economic variables: - caste, family type, family size, number of sibling, father's education, mother's education, father's occupation, mother's occupation, monthly income.

Measurement of Soft skills: Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale of Social Maturity -was used to determine soft skills of children including adaptive and communication skills. These skills tell how children take care of themselves and to *get along* with others. The prime importance it was, was not a given activity is usually or habitually performed by the children⁹. If it is usually or habitually performed, is it sometimes or partially performed or not at all. The various domains are described as below:

First domain deals with the communication skills, or how to speak with other person and understands others reading and writing skills. Another domain has to do with adaptive skills-that are needed to take care of one self and others. These are called daily living skills. The third domain involving the skills that people need to *get alongside* with others people, as well as their play activities and use of leisure time. These are called socialization. The last domain was the important physical skills. We name these as "motor skills".

Scoring procedure: All items in the domains were scored on the basis that, activity is usually or habitually performed (score 2) or performed sometimes or with partial success (score 1) never performed (score 0).

Independent variables: Socio-personal, socio-economic variables, Early Childhood Education Programme and home environment were taken as independent variables, socio-personal variables included age, gender, birth order and number of siblings.

Socio-economic variables, viz., parental education, parental occupation, family income, family type and its size were taken as independent variables.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented and discussed in the following heads.

Profile of children with regard to socio personal, socio economic:

Profile for socio-personal variables: Information of children with regard to some important ecological variables, viz., age, birth order, education and occupation of their fathers and mothers, number of siblings, family size, family type and family income is presented in Table1 which indicated that higher percentage of children (32.00) in the age group of 3⁺ were from rural areas, higher percentage of children (42.00) in 4⁺ were also from rural areas whereas in the age group of 5⁺ years more percentage of children (39.00) were from urban areas.

Socio-Economic profile of children (N=100 each): With regard to birth order near half (53%) of children having first birth order whereas in urban majority of children (73.00 %) were having first birth order. A total of 47 per cent of children were having second birth order in rural areas and 27 per cent of children were having second birth order in urban areas. Majority of respondents (71.00%) in rural areas had small family size and 29 percent children had large family size in rural areas. In urban areas equal percent of respondents had both family sizes.

With regard to father's education, it was observed that in rural areas majority of respondents (37.00 %) had fathers who were educated in matric level followed by equal per cent (28%) and (26%) of respondents whose fathers' were educated upto senior secondary and graduate level respectively. In urban areas, maximum number of children's fathers (75.00 %) was post graduate followed by 20 per cent of the respondents whose fathers were graduate. Only 5% respondents had fathers with higher secondary level of education.

Regarding education of mothers, it was observed that in rural areas majority of respondents (41.00%) whose mothers were educated up to matriculation whereas (34.00 %) of children had illiterate mothers. Only 10 % of respondents whose mothers were graduate. In urban areas majority (49.00 %) of children had their mothers who were educated up to higher secondary level followed by children (26.00 %) whose mothers were graduate. Only 5% respondents were having mothers with matriculation.

With regard to father’s occupation it was observed in rural areas that 50 per cent of children’s fathers were involved in farming whereas 23 per cent of children’s fathers were involved in business. Only 27% of respondents’ fathers in service. In urban areas 68% of children’s fathers were involved in service, whereas 32% were involved in business.

Regarding occupation of mothers, it was observed that in rural areas majority (74.00%) of respondents whose mothers were housewives, whereas 20.00 % respondents’ mothers were in service but only 6% respondents’ mothers were laborers.

With reference to type of family, it was observed in rural areas that majority of respondents (85.00 %) belonged to joint type of family and 15 per cent of respondents belonged to nuclear family. In urban areas it was also observed that majority (59.00 %) of respondents were belonged joint family followed by nuclear family (41.00 %).

With regard to number of siblings it was observed that in rural areas majority of respondents (52 %) were having two sibling followed by 34 per cent respondents had three and above three siblings and 14 per cent respondents had only one sibling. In urban areas it was observed that majority of respondents (61 %) were having two siblings followed by (33 %) were having one sibling and 6 per cent respondents had three and more than three siblings.

In rural areas, majority (75.00 %) of respondents belonged to those family whose income was upto Rs.30, 000 followed by

15% of respondents belonged to those family whose income was in the range of Rs.30, 000 –Rs.50,000 per month. Only 10% of respondents belonged to the families with income in the range of Rs.50,000– Rs.1,00,000. In urban areas, majority 63% of respondents belonged to those family whose income was from Rs.50, 000 to Rs. 1,00,000 followed by 31% of respondents belonged to those family whose income was in between Rs.30, 000 to Rs. 50,000. Only 6% of respondents belonged to the family with income up to Rs. 30, 000.

With regard to caste, majority of 34% respondents were in general category in rural areas whereas 25% were in SC category. Equal percentage (21%) and (20%) of respondents belonged to BC and OBC caste in rural areas respondents. In urban areas, maximum number of respondents (66%) was in general category whereas 29% and 5% were belonged to SC and BC category respondents.

Mean performance of children on soft skills during the age of 3-5 years: Table-3 showed the mean score of boys and girls on soft skills. In rural areas, the mean scores of boys during the age of 3⁺ and 4⁺ years on soft skills were low than the girls. In urban areas the mean scores of girls in the age group 3⁺, 4⁺ and 5⁺ years on soft skills were high than the boys. The mean scores of boys were low in rural and urban areas during the age of 3⁺, 4⁺ and 5⁺ years. There was no significant difference from three age groups on the basis of overall mean. There was also significant differences over locations (z = 7.80**), (4.91**) and (3.58**) in age group of 3⁺, 4⁺ and 5⁺ years.

Table-1
Mean performance of children on soft skills during age 3⁺ to 5⁺ years.

Gender	3 ⁺ years	4 ⁺ years	5 ⁺ years	Overall mean
Rural	Mean±Sd	Mean±Sd	Mean±Sd	Mean±Sd
Boys	378.00±34.38	397.46±49.62	378.50±119.54	391.63±65.79
Girls	404.66±45.22	415.80±105.31	374.15±48.49	392.04±62.98
Overall mean	398.00±47.89	401.83±66.02	375.18±69.40	391.85±63.96
Z-test (boys vs. girls)	1.08NS	0.53NS	0.10NS	0.03NS
Urban				
Boys	478.58±24.72	460.95±34.95	405.00±36.86	453.22±42.15
Girls	485.70±28.89	465.16±43.88	425.68±29.91	452.87±41.14
Overall mean	483.03±27.22	461.83±36.15	421.87±32.87	453.03±41.39
Z-test (boys vs. girls)	0.73NS	0.21NS	0.75NS	0.04NS
Z –test over location	7.80**	4.91**	3.58**	2.2*

** Significant at p=0.01, *Significant at p=0.05, NS= Non significant , ± Value indicate standard deviation.

Discussion: This chapter includes the discussion of the investigation. The findings of the study were obtained after analysis of the data. Current evidence supports the idea that increased soft skills is associated with favourable measures of development. The outputs of the present study are presented and discussed in the following heads.

Profile for socio-personal variables: Information of children with regard to some important ecological variables, viz., age, birth order, education and occupation of their fathers and mothers, number of siblings, family size, family type and family income results which indicated that higher percentage of children in the age group of 3+ were from rural areas, higher percentage of children in 4+ were also from rural areas whereas in the age group of 5+ years more percentage of children were from urban areas.

With regard to birth order near half of children having first birth order whereas in urban majority of children were having first birth order. A near about of children were having second birth order in rural areas and near about one third of children were having second birth order in urban areas. Majority of respondents in rural areas had small family size and 29 percent children had large family size in rural areas. In urban areas equal percent of respondents had both family sizes.

With regard to father's education, it was observed that in rural areas majority of respondents had fathers who were educated in matric level followed by equal per cent and of respondents whose fathers' were educated upto senior secondary and graduate level respectively. In urban areas, maximum number of children's fathers was post graduate followed by 20 per cent of the respondents whose fathers were graduate. Only 5% respondents had fathers with higher secondary level of education.

Regarding education of mothers, it was observed that in rural areas majority of respondents whose mothers were educated up to matriculation whereas of children had illiterate mothers. Only 10 % of respondents whose mothers were graduates. In urban areas majority of children had their mothers who were educated up to higher secondary level followed by children whose mothers were graduate. Only 5% respondents were having mothers with matriculation.

With regard to father's occupation it was observed in rural areas that half of children's fathers were involved in farming whereas 23 per cent of children's fathers were involved in business. Only of respondents' fathers in service. In urban areas 68% of children's fathers were involved in service, whereas were involved in business.

Regarding occupation of mothers, it was observed that in rural areas majority of respondents whose mothers were housewives, whereas 20.00 % respondents' mothers were in service but only 6% respondents' mothers were laborers.

With reference to type of family, it was observed in rural areas that majority of respondents (85.00 %) belonged to joint type of family and 15 per cent of respondents belonged to nuclear family. In urban areas it was also observed that majority of respondents were belonged joint family followed by nuclear family.

With regard to number of siblings it was observed that in rural areas majority of respondents were having two sibling followed by 34 per cent respondents had three and above three siblings and 14 per cent respondents had only one sibling. In urban areas it was observed that majority of respondents were having two siblings followed by were having one sibling and 6 per cent respondents had three and more than three siblings.

In rural areas, majority of respondents belonged to those family whose income was upto Rs.30, 000 followed by 15% of respondents belonged to those family whose income was in the range of Rs.30,000 –Rs.50,000 per month. A few number of respondents belonged to the families with income in the range of Rs.50,000– Rs.1,00,000. In urban areas, majority of respondents belonged to those family whose income was from Rs.50, 000 to Rs. 1,00,000 followed by those whose income was in between Rs.30, 000 to Rs. 50,000. Only few respondents belonged to the family with income up to Rs. 30, 000.

With regard to caste, majority of 34% respondents were in general category in rural areas whereas were in SC category. Equal percentage and of respondents belonged to BC and OBC caste in rural areas respondents. In urban areas, maximum number of respondents was in general category whereas and were belonged to SC and BC category respondents.

Conclusion

Mean performance of children on soft skills during the age of 3-5 years:- Results showed the mean score of boys and girls on soft skills. In rural areas, the mean scores of boys during the age of 3+ and 4+ years on soft skills were low than the girls. In urban areas the mean scores of girls in the age group 3+, 4+ and 5+ years on soft skills were high than the boys. The mean scores of boys were low in rural and urban areas during the age of 3+, 4+ and 5+ years. There was no significant difference from three age groups on the basis of overall mean as this is sensitive periods in the development of the brain and behavior skills (Knudsen, 2004¹⁰). There was also significant differences over locations in age group of 3+, 4+ and 5+ years.

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