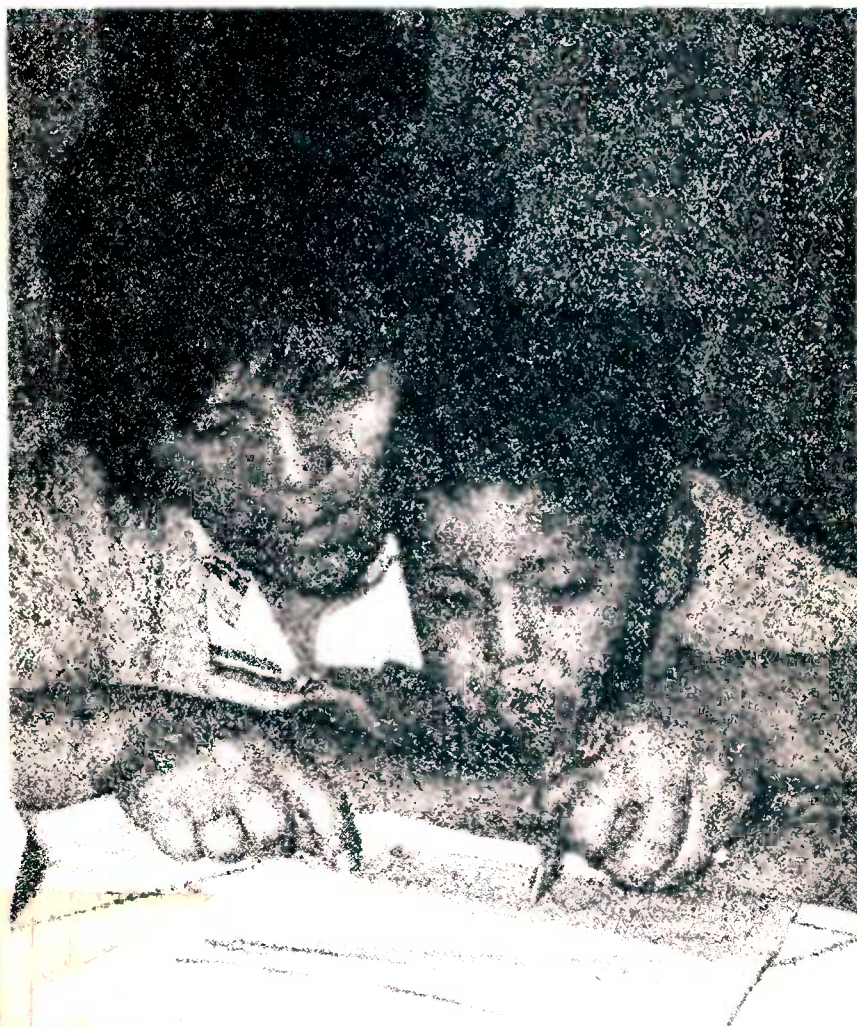

Preventing School Failure:

*The Relationship Between
Preschool and Primary Education*



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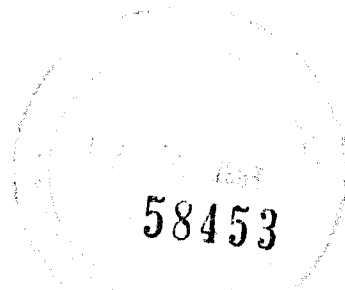
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Preventing School Failure: The Relationship Between Preschool and Primary Education

**Proceedings of a workshop on preschool research
held in Bogota, Colombia, 26-29 May 1981**



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Résumé

Cette publication contient les exposés présentés au cours d'un séminaire sur la relation entre l'éducation préscolaire et primaire qui a été tenu à Bogota, Colombie, en mai 1981, sous les auspices du CRDI et de la Fondation Ford. Le séminaire a réuni des chercheurs en éducation préscolaire venus de diverses régions du monde et spécialisés dans différentes disciplines. L'éveil précoce des enfants fut examiné à la lumière des études de cas et des programmes nationaux présentés, et analysé en fonction des effets à court et à long terme qu'il peut avoir sur le développement de l'enfant et son succès lors de son entrée dans le système scolaire. Les travaux sont groupés sous trois grands thèmes : recherche et action en éducation préscolaire et primaire; considérations sur le problème de l'éducation préscolaire et primaire; et discussions et recommandations générales.

Resumen

Esta publicación contiene las ponencias presentadas en un seminario sobre la relación entre educación preescolar y primaria, celebrado en Bogotá, Colombia, en mayo de 1981 bajo los auspicios del CIID y la Fundación Ford. El seminario reunió a investigadores de la educación preescolar procedentes de diversas regiones del mundo y con diferentes formaciones disciplinarias. La estimulación infantil temprana fue vista a la luz de los estudios de caso y los programas nacionales presentados, y analizada en función de los efectos que a corto o largo plazo puede tener sobre el desarrollo del niño y su éxito al ingresar al sistema educativo formal. Tres amplias secciones agrupan los trabajos de acuerdo con los temas tratados: investigación y acción en educación preescolar y primaria; consideraciones sobre la problemática preescolar y primaria; y discusiones y recomendaciones generales.

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Preschool Services in Thailand

Nittaya Passornsiri¹

According to the generally accepted principles of developmental psychology, a child's earliest years are most important for physical, mental, social, and personality development. The initial life experiences may enhance, expand, or inhibit his or her further development. This, of course, depends on the environment at an age when the child learns most rapidly. Thus, if we do not teach the child properly in the beginning, we will spend even more time remedying our mistakes (Home Economics Associations of Thailand 1975). With this recognition, the Committee for Establishing the Framework for Educational Reform proposed that the building of potentialities and character in Thai children must begin at early childhood (Office of the National Education Commission 1976).

Suppose the following questions were asked: How important does the government consider the services and education of these children to be? What are the most common problems of Thai children?

To adequately answer these questions, we must examine government policies and practices and the present status and problems of Thai children and government efforts to solve these problems. This paper will seek answers to the above questions in related studies.

National Policy on Preschool Services

The evolution of preschool education in government policy has gone from emphasis on formal teaching to emphasis on the child's total development. Also, the emphasis has changed from providing only formal schooling (kindergarten and preschool classes added on to primary schools) to a nonformal approach to education (in the form of child development centres).

At present, the government realizes the importance of organizing preschool education and views education as a component of a comprehensive services program for children. These can be seen from the government's acceptance of the principles proposed in the report by the Committee for Establishing the Framework for Educational Reform in 1975. One of these principles specified the importance of preprimary education and the need to coordinate the efforts of the responsible agencies in the mobilization of resources to provide proper care and training before compulsory education for children in every locality. Taking care of the young child is the joint responsibility of the family, the community, and the government. In organizing services, efforts must be coordinated on all fronts including health, community development, nutrition, and education (Office of the National Education Commission 1976).

The National Scheme of Education, 1977, undertaken in 1978, established the groundwork on which the government was to accelerate and promote preschool education. The responsibility was to lie mainly with local districts and the private sector on the condition that the centres remain under government supervision. At the preprimary level of education, the government was to provide some model kindergartens and do relevant research (Office of the National Education Commission 1977b).

This policy statement was expanded and made more operational in the Fourth National Education Development Plan (1977-81). The plan states that precompulsory education may be of different types as appropriate to local conditions. Preschool models may be arranged as either formal or out-of-school education. It may, for example, take the form of a nursery home, a child-care centre, a class for small children, or a kindergarten. The aim of preschool education is to lay a foundation so that a child may go on to the next stage of his or her education properly

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prepared (Office of the National Education Commission 1977a).

Educational policy relating to preschool services also appears in the Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan under public health, food, and nutrition policies. Government policy on public health calls for: "... improvements in the health of mothers and their children and in nutrition in general, especially among infants and preschool children, to ensure that the nutritional content of foods provides the necessities for physical growth" (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board 1977). The policy on food and nutrition requires that preschool children (between 6 months and 2 years of age) with nutrition problems receive the necessary food supplements at the various service centres maintained by the Ministries of Public Health, the Interior, and Education and the Bangkok Metropolis; that stations be set up in the villages to distribute such foods; and that food be distributed directly to the houses of children with serious problems (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board 1977).

Up until now, there has been no policy concerning universal preschool education other than the proposal of the Educational Reform Committee that 5-year-olds in the rural areas be given the benefit of compensatory education before entering primary school at age 6.

Although there is a need to coordinate the agencies responsible for organizing preschool services, the lack of a clear definition of the role of each agency has resulted in expanded separate efforts rather than in cooperation (Sriprasat 1979). As a result, there is duplication of services for preschool children in some areas, whereas in other areas no services are available.

Current Status of Preschool Services: Problems and Issues

Preschool services are increasingly important. Not only have women gone from being housewives to being outside workers, but the competition to enter prestigious primary schools requires that children be well-prepared for their further education.

In responding to the need for preschool services, both government and private agencies are involved in preschool programs. The government agencies include various departments of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Public Health.

Many types of preschool experiences are available to children in this age group: (a) formal education for 2 years in kindergarten for children between the ages of 4–6 years old; (b) formal education in schools for preprimary children who may spend 1 year there before entering the first grade. These children are 5–6 years old; and (c) nonformal education in child development centres of various types such as nutrition centres, child development centres, day-care centres, or child-care centres. The ages range from 0 to 6 years.

The first two types of the preschool experiences aim to prepare the children for entrance into primary education, whereas the third type aims to provide child-care services to reduce the burden of working mothers. Some aim to improve child health and nutrition.

The differences in the objectives of the agencies are attributable to the need to match their services to their own major tasks. For example, the Department of Health directs its efforts at solving the health and nutrition problems of children, which is part of its principal task regarding people of all ages.

However, almost all of the programs stress instruction in the three R's, often in response to parental pressure. Parents believe that the sooner their children learn to read and write the higher will be their achievement in school. Furthermore, child-care workers or teachers perceive learning and reading as synonymous. If they do not teach the children to read, they do not know what activities to organize in its place. In addition, the most important reason for the emphasis on literacy skills is the primary schools themselves, because eligibility to enter the better known schools is based on a competitive examination (Office of the National Education Commission 1979).

As for the *availability of services*, about 9% of the children in the 4–6 years of age group attend kindergartens and child development centres, which means that there are about 3.6 million children in this age group who do not have any access to preschool services. The opportunity to benefit from these services is open only to those who live in the cities, suburban areas, towns, and certain rural areas. Of the total number of children who received such services in 1979, 41% were children from Bangkok, whereas the other 59% were from 71 provinces (UNESCO 1979).

The distribution of the 4641 school centres by area is shown in Table 1 (66% are government school centres, 1% of which are in Bangkok and 65% are in other areas). Of the 34% of the nongovernment centres, 20% are in Bangkok and 14%

Table 1. Preschool statistics in 1978.

Area	Preschool-age children (4-6 years)	No. at preschool institutions		Preschool institutions						Institutions that train preschool teachers		Cost of preschool education in 1977 (recurrent cost/person/year) ^b	Income per person 1977 ^c
				Government		Non-government ^a		Total		Government	Non-government		
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%				
Bangkok	n.a. ^d	151298	41	62	2	893	20	955	21	2	—	2671	n.a.
Other provinces	n.a.	217721	59	3014	65	672	14	3686	79	14	—	758	n.a.
Total	3985000	369019	100	3076	66	1565	34	4641	100	16	—	824	8377

^aPrivate kindergartens under the Ministry of Education, private nurseries under the Ministry of the Interior, and preschool centres operated by private agencies.

^bAverage cost from a sample survey of preschools, 1977, NEC, unpublished data.

^cOffice of the National Economic and Social Development Board, National Income Statistics of Thailand, Bangkok, National Accounts Division, 1978: 10.

^dn.a. = not applicable.

are in other areas. Thus, there are more government centres than nongovernment centres in other provinces. The situation is just the opposite for Bangkok. Also, preschool children in Bangkok are served mainly by private kindergartens and private day-care centres, whereas children in other areas are served mainly by child development centres, child nutrition centres, and preschool classes in primary schools.

Although only 11% of the children receive these services, and the government contributes 28% of the investment cost, there is still an overlap of investments in some localities. At the same time, there are still many poor children who receive no services whatsoever (Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation 1978).

In addition, the orientation of the programs is essentially toward educating children of normal physical and mental capabilities. Facilities for the deaf, the blind, and other types of disabilities are very limited (Office of the National Education Commission 1977b).

As for the *nature of financing*, preschool education during 1974-77 received 72% of its financial support from donations, parents, and foundations; the remaining 28% was provided by the government (Office of the National Education Commission 1979).

The degree of government support varies considerably from area to area. For example, government kindergartens, which mainly serve advantaged children, receive full salaries for teachers, equipment, supplies, and a building. Child development centres receive partial support for equipment and supplies and a monthly salary of about US\$16 for every child-care worker. Parents are required to make up the difference between the funds provided by the government and the total cost of the services. Private kindergartens are financed mainly by allowances and registration fees as government support is limited. The annual cost per child for all types of centres is from US\$1 to US\$300 (Office of the National Education Commission 1979).

The average current costs for preschool education in Bangkok and other provinces are US\$133 and US\$38, respectively. The cost of providing such services in Bangkok is almost four times greater than in other provinces. When comparing the cost of preschool services with income per person, the cost of services is considerably high and this may be the reason why such services do not reach the most disadvantaged children in the rural areas.

In general, the preschool children receiving these services are of upper- and middle-class sta-

tus as seen from the per-person income of their families (\$1700 or more), which is above the Thai national average. These children also have better nutrition than the national average (Office of the National Education Commission 1979). From the weights of children 2-4 years of age in the schools and centres, 0.29% were severely undernourished (degree 3), whereas 4% and 29% were undernourished (degrees 2 and 1), as compared with the national average of 3%, 35% and 30%, respectively (Office of the National Education Commission 1981).

The foregoing information gives an overview of the external factors related to preschool opportunity. If preschool educational factors are looked at as a means of preparing children to enter the primary school system, there are still many problems, especially regarding the role of the school or centre in widening the achievement gaps among children entering primary school. The problem is a result of vast differences in the quality of existing services. Moreover, the government has given the best to those with the best opportunities. Therefore, it is suspected that these causal factors somehow accumulate in disadvantaged sectors of society. They produce more and more extreme differences in primary school learning.

As for *conflicting beliefs in preschool education*, there exist different theories and practices as to the types of experiences that should be given to preschoolers, e.g., emphasis on learning the three R's versus play activities, formal schooling versus nonformal organization, and so on.

Current practices indicate that the majority tend to favour the formal method of group instruction rather than individual interaction with children. In addition, the majority tend to support the teaching of the three R's and are supported in this by parental aspirations. Thus, certain private kindergartens have provided both programs in the same school to satisfy the choices of the parents.

One of the studies conducted attempted to measure the direct impact of two preschool programs on student achievement in grades 2 and 4. The comparison was made between those who went through an overall readiness program and those who formally learned the three R's before entering grade 1. The findings were that both groups performed the same, except the first group achieved decidedly better results in social development than the second (Thai-Israel Friendship Group 1980).

Another study showed that children who went through a readiness program in their early years enjoyed learning in primary school more than

those exposed to the three R's program. The first group learned happily, whereas the second group became bored (Thai-Israel Friendship Group 1980).

The last problem to be considered here is the problem related to *personnel*. The survey by the National Education Commission indicates that there are large differences among the staff of the schools and centres with respect to both preservice and in-service training and academic and technical assistance. There is also a need for close and continuous supervision in this regard (Office of the National Education Commission 1979).

The preceding view of the current status of preschool services has shown the government's efforts respecting preschool education, which will be even greater in the Sixth National Educational Plan. It is estimated that when universal primary education in Thailand is accomplished, then the question may be raised as to whether or not more attention should be devoted to the preschool preparation of children relative to the upward expansion of secondary education (Ketudat 1978). With respect to such critical questions as budget allocations, it is important to have as much information as possible about the current status of preschool education and its effects on Thai children.

Research for Planning Preschool Services

In response to the need for research, an evaluative study of preschool programs was conducted by the Office of the National Education Commission, the policy and planning unit for all levels of education. The study is based upon the analysis of the current policy, problems, and issues related to preschool services covered earlier.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to evaluate existing preschool programs so that the findings of the study could be used as a basis for decision-making regarding (a) types of preschool experiences that facilitate qualitative improvements in primary education and should be further developed and (b) national preschool education policies and the degree of priority for this type of education.

The study attempted to achieve the following objectives: (a) to compare the effectiveness of preschool experiences of various types, (b) to compare the impact of "no preschool experience" and the different types of preschool experiences on grades 1 and 3 outcomes; and (c) to identify

variables, particularly those related to preschool experiences and that play significant roles in facilitating or inhibiting the achievement of educational goals in grades 1 and 3.

Methodology

The preschool age children in the sample were divided into four groups according to types of experience received before going to primary schools: (a) 2 years in kindergarten (KG), (b) 1 year of preprimary classes in the primary school (PE), (c) 1 year in child development institutions (CD), and (d) at-home control group (HC).

The KG group refers to children who spent 2 years in public or private kindergartens. Most of them were in urban areas. The PE group consists of children who spent 1 year in preprimary classes attached to primary schools operated by the municipalities and the National Primary Education Commission. The CD group consists of children with 1 year of experience in child development centres and child nutrition centres, etc. The HC group consists of children without preschool experience. These children lived in the districts where the preschool centres in the sample corresponding to the three other groups were situated.

The effectiveness of the various types of preschool experiences were evaluated: (a) through the performance of children in preschool centres after having been exposed to the preschool experiences for approximately 1 year, and (b) through the grade 1 and grade 3 performance (affective, cognitive, motor) of children who had been exposed to different types of preschool experiences.

For all groups involved in this project, various measures of readiness, cognitive and noncognitive achievement, socioeconomic background, quality of services, child and student characteristics, social context, and so on, were applied at the end of regular schooling.

The comparison of the readiness and performance of these four groups was based on an analysis of the effects of the independent variables such as geographic location of the centres or schools, SES, and so on. The key variable of interest is, of course, the type of preschool experience and its relative impact.

The Pretest Post-test Control Group Design was employed. The subjects were randomly selected. The types of experiences were considered as well as the treatment, effectiveness, and cognitive and noncognitive achievement as the measures of the outcome at the end of the school year.

To analyze the factors that appear to be most important in explaining child readiness, grade 1 and grade 3 performance and factor and path analyses were utilized. The comparison was of the four groups with reference to the independent variables mentioned earlier. It will be interesting to see if preschool effects diminish significantly over time.

With respect to in-depth qualitative analyses, the studies will focus on the process of preschool education, i.e., classroom interaction analysis and social behaviour in the young child.

Upon completion of the study, a curriculum and strategies for disadvantaged children will be designed to improve the cognitive, affective, and motor development of the children. This second phase of the study will also include the development of other subsystems related to the improvement of the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of preschool programs. These include, for example, the training of personnel and the monitoring and evaluation of learning experiences.

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