



## Language Stimulation and Encouragement of Social Maturity Available to Preschoolers (3-6 years) of Gujjar Tribe from District Udhampur

### KEYWORDS

Gujjar children, Preschoolers, Language Stimulation, Encouragement for Social Maturity, Home Environment.

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**ABSTRACT** *Preschool years of life are the golden years for laying a good foundation for a lifelong system of thoughts and feelings about self and others. Environment has a powerful impact on the competence development of the child as it accelerate or slow it down. But majority of the tribal children in our country do not receive the required rich environment and stimulation at home for their natural growth and development. The present study was undertaken to analyse the language stimulation and encouragement for social maturity available to preschoolers (3-6 years) of Gujjar Tribe from District Udhampur. The total sample for the study comprised of 92 preschooler-mother dyads selected from settled Gujjar families. A modified version of Mohite's Home Environment Inventory was used to assess the level of stimulation children received at their homes and on spot observations were also used to validate the results. The results of the study revealed that majority of the children received 'moderate' level of language stimulation (80.43%) as well as encouragement for social maturity (84.78%). It was noted that most mothers answered their child's queries verbally, conversed with them about their needs and responded to them in a positive manner and also indulged in non instructional exchange with them. Also, mothers asked their children to perform some tasks at home like taking care of younger siblings but at the same time most mothers were found to be physically nurturing towards their children. Statistically, there was no significant difference between language stimulation and level of encouragement for social maturity received by male and female preschoolers. From the findings, it can be summarized that maternal contribution was of adequate quality inspite of disadvantaged living conditions of sample Gujjar children, as they tend to show no major lack in receiving stimulation.*

### INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, philosophers have expressed the belief that children's earliest experiences have the greatest impact on their development. Especially the preschool years demand new adaptations within the family as the child moves rapidly through a highly significant series of changes. In this formative period, development takes place rapidly in terms of acquisition of skills, habits, attitudes, concepts and power of observance as well as ability to think and to communicate. Studies have shown that mothers play an integral role in overall development of a child in number of ways like showing responsiveness to the developmental needs of the child; providing the right type of material for stimulating the child and moreover they are also involved in child care and disciplining (Manocha, 2008).

Zuckow (1998) reported that mothers of higher intellect, education and socio-economic status knowledgeably provide more stimulating home environment to facilitate their children's overall development. Other studies also highlighted that children playing with their mothers stimulated them more than playing alone. In addition, parental warmth, use of praise and encouraging them to do work motivate the child for achieving higher goals in life. Estrada (1999) reported that the mothers who have good relationship with their children encouraged them to engage in various learning activities and support them in problem solving. Children in these relationships may also be more competent and more willing to accept maternal assistance. Children who have warm and flexible relationship with their mothers use them more readily as a stable emotional base for exploring the wider world and learning from these experiences.

It is very important for children to have stable and loving

relationship with their caregivers especially their mothers. As they grow they learn by watching and imitating her, as well as by getting instructions and guidance from her. When they manage to do something, their learning is reinforced by her praise and approval. This is the ideal environment for a child to develop his/her potential to the maximum. Studies have shown that children who are abandoned and separated from their mothers become unhappy and depressed. Moreover, there is delay in their learning abilities, concentration, work efficiency, communication skills and are found to be socially immature (Martini & Norris, 2000).

The way in which the parents communicate with the child, the choice of words, the underlying ideas and values, the extent to which they give meaning to their experiences have a lasting impact in shaping the personality of the child. Showing parents how to have fun with their babies could foster a warm, responsive relationship between them. This might involve, at earlier ages, give and take, social games, whereas later in the development, mutual activities such as cooking, story- telling, and play could be the vehicles for parental involvement especially mothers. Over stimulation of the child could be prevented through judicious use of the television, and by fostering a predictable, regular routine in the home. Visual exploration could be enhanced with mirror games and homemade stabiles. Finally, establishing toy and book lending library would help increase the variety and appropriateness of stimulation in the home (Ravner and Knitzer, 2002).

Language development leads children to master new words that capture new ideas. Physical development allows them to perform more complicated tasks than they could earlier, bringing them into greater social contact with others. It results from the interaction between individual

factors of heredity and environmental forces. Abnormal growth patterns often reflect this interaction. Physical developments are found to be affected by the environment no less than psychological ones. A healthy environment is necessary for normal growth of the body, brain, and nervous system of preschoolers (UNICEF, 2013).

Tribals are one of the most exploited and deprived section of the population in Indian society. On all indicators of development, they remain the most excluded despite the fact that various policies and programmes have been pursued for their upliftment in the post-Independence India. Needless to say that exclusion from fruits of development has adversely affected the quality of life of the tribal people. Tribal children are no exception in this regard (UNICEF, 2010). In India, 427 groups have been recognised as scheduled tribes which form approximately 8 per cent of the total Indian population. These tribal groups inhabit widely varying ecological and geo-climatic conditions (hilly, forest, desert, etc.) in different concentration throughout the country with different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Due to their remote and isolated living, tribal groups are difficult to reach (Basu, 2000).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**SAMPLE DESCRIPTION:** The total sample size for the study comprised of 92 preschooler-mother dyads. All the selected preschoolers were aged 3-6 years, belonging to settled Gujjar families of Udhampur district. Forty-two of the sample preschoolers were boys and rest were girls.

**LOCALE OF THE STUDY:** The entire sample was selected from different areas of Udhampur district, having high concentration of settled Gujjar tribe.

**SAMPLING TECHNIQUE:** The sample for the present study was selected by random sampling technique. Udhampur district has 6 demarcated areas having high concentration of settled (non-nomadic) Gujjar tribe. Out of these, 3 areas were selected by lottery method. Once the areas were selected by snowball sampling, those Gujjar families were selected which had atleast one preschooler in the age group of 3-6 years along with his/her mother. Hence, a total of 92 preschooler- mother dyads were selected from settled Gujjar families to form the core group for the study.

**TOOLS FOR THE STUDY:** The following tools were used for data collection.

1. **Home Environment Inventory:** A modified version of Mohite's Home Environment Inventory was used to assess the quality of home environment available to the preschoolers.
2. **On Spot Observations:** Observations were carried out to supplement information related to home environment and mother-child interaction for the sample tribal preschoolers.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed for data analysis. Appropriate statistical techniques were used where ever applicable to support the results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the present study are presented as follows:

### 1. PROVISION FOR LANGUAGE STIMULATION TO PRESCHOOLERS

**Table 1 Provision for Language Stimulation to Preschoolers**

Level of stimulation	Male (n=42)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=92)
Poor/Lacking	02 (04.76%)	01 (02.00%)	03 (03.26%)
Moderate	34 (80.95%)	40 (80.00%)	42 (80.43%)
High	06 (14.28%)	09 (18.00%)	15 (16.30%)
$\chi^2$ value = 0.73 <sub>2</sub> , p value = 0.694, insignificant			

Early language and communication skills are crucial for children's success in school and beyond. Language and communication skills include the ability to understand others (i.e., receptive language) and express oneself (i.e., expressive language) by using words, gestures or facial expressions. Table 1 depicts the level of language stimulation received by the sample preschoolers. Overall, most of the sample Gujjar children received 'moderate' language stimulation. This means that there was neither too much emphasis on language development of the children; nor was there complete absence of this. Most sample mothers provided average levels of language stimulation through various means to their preschool children.

Between male and female children, calculation of Chi-square indicates that there was no significant difference in the level of language stimulation. Manocha and Balda (2011) while examining the quality of home environment provided by mothers to their children in Haryana had however, reported that in case of language development mothers exposed their children to low level of language stimulation.

## 2. LANGUAGE INPUTS TO PRESCHOOLERS BY MOTHERS

**Table 2 Language Inputs to Preschoolers by Mothers**

Inputs	Male (n=42)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=92)
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
Mother answers child questions verbally.	34 (80.95)	45 (90.00)	79 (85.86)
Converses with the child atleast twice during visit.	33 (78.57)	37 (74.00)	70 (76.08)
Responds verbally to the child.	37 (88.09)	45 (90.00)	82 (89.13)
Gives instruction to the child in a positive tone.	29 (69.04)	33 (66.00)	62 (67.39)
Encourages the child to converse with the interviewer.	12 (28.57)	16 (32.00)	28 (30.43)
Books, magazines or newspapers are visible in the house.	08 (19.04)	11 (22.00)	19 (20.65)
Mother has one non-instructional exchange with the child.	27 (64.28)	33 (66.00)	60 (65.21)
$\chi^2$ value = 0.448 <sub>6</sub> , p value = 0.998, insignificant			

Language development is an important aspect of life during early years of childhood development as major learning continues throughout child's early years and language learning is a lifelong process. Language stimulation provided to children was analysed under seven categories namely mother answered child questions verbally, conversed with the child during visit, responded verbally to the child, gave instructions in a positive tone, books, magazines or newspapers were visible in the house and had non-instructional exchange with the child. Results reveal

that most mothers verbally responded to their children (89.13%), answered their questions verbally (85.86%), conversed with their children (76.08%) and gave instructions in a positive tone (67.39%). However, least encouragement was provided by mothers to converse with the interviewer (30.43%) and only in 20.65% houses books, magazines or newspapers were seen. Statistically there was no significant difference between the language stimulation inputs received by male and female preschool aged children. Most children across sex received verbal instructions from their mothers related to household tasks such as cattle rearing, studying, playing with toys or friends and conversed with their mothers verbally about their basic requirements like food, clothing etc.

**3. ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SOCIAL MATURITY**

**Table 3 Encouragement for Social Maturity**

Level of stimulation	Male (n=42)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=92)
Poor/Lacking	03 (07.14%)	03 (06.00%)	06 (06.52%)
Moderate	36 (85.71%)	42 (84.00%)	78 (84.78%)
High	03 (07.14%)	05 (10.00%)	08 (08.69%)

$\chi^2$  value = 0.268<sub>2</sub>, p value = 0.874, insignificant

The emotional and social maturity of a child is an essential factor for overall child development during preschool years. Infact, social maturity is an important aspect for preschool readiness, their independent functioning and social interaction with peer groups in an effective manner. Results on encouragement of social maturity of sample preschoolers by their mothers indicate that overall (84.78%) majority of them received 'moderate' levels of encouragement for social maturity. This trend continued for both male (85.71%) as well as female (84%) children separately also. Moreover, most mothers conversed with their children and maintained physical proximity with them. In only 6 cases poor level of stimulation for encouraging social maturity among sample children were noted. These mothers didn't seem interested in introducing visitor to child and demonstrating child's achievement to others.

Statistically there was no significant difference between level of encouragement of social maturity received by male and female sample children. Similar results were forwarded by Manocha and Balda (2011) in their observational study on quality of home environment provided by mothers to their children in Haryana.

**4. SOCIAL MATURITY INPUTS TO PRESCHOOLERS BY MOTHERS**

**Table 4 Social Maturity Inputs to Preschoolers by Mothers**

Inputs	Male (n=42)	Female (n=50)	Total (n=92)
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
Parents converses with the child atleast twice during visit.	33 (78.57)	39 (78.00)	72 (78.26)
Mother asked child to do some housework.	27 (64.28)	24 (48.00)	51 (55.43)
Parents introduce visitor to child.	13 (30.95)	20 (40.00)	33 (35.86)
Asks child to take care younger siblings/neighborhood children.	29 (69.04)	31 (62.00)	60 (65.21)
Mother cares, kisses or cuddles child during visit.	38 (90.47)	43 (86.00)	81 (88.04)
Answers child requests/questions verbally.	33 (78.57)	40 (80.00)	73 (79.34)

Mother helps child to demonstrate some achievement during visit.	04 (09.57)	07 (14.00)	11 (11.95)
$\chi^2$ value = 0.448 <sub>6</sub> , p value = 0.998, insignificant			

In day to day life, mothers perform certain activities consciously or unconsciously which may become an effective tool for encouragement of child in different spheres of life leading to his or her overall development. Especially mothers play an important part in child's social development during his/her early years. Encouragement of social maturity provided to children was assessed under seven categories namely parents conversed with the child, asked child to do some housework, introduce visitor to child, asked child to take care of younger siblings, mothers kissed, cared and cuddled their child, answered their queries verbally and helped child to demonstrate some achievement during visit. Results highlight that most mothers cared and cuddled their children (88.04%) highlighting the physical proximity mothers shared with their children; most mothers also answered their requests verbally (79.34%); conversed with their children (78.26%); and asked their children to take care of younger siblings (65.21%) in an attempt to develop their social maturity. While on the other hand, only 35.86% mothers introduced visitor to child and 11.95% mothers helped their child to demonstrate some achievement during visit depicting low level of encouragement of social maturity provided by mothers in these two dimensions. Calculation of Chi-square indicates that there was no significant difference between the level of encouragement of social maturity received by male and female Gujjar children.

**CONCLUSION:**

Preschool years are the most crucial years for overall development of a child. One development is significantly related and dependent on another developmental domain and vice-versa. Preschool years find a special mention in researches as a stage of rapid and significant developmental attainments. Many variables have further been noted to affect the developmental status of the children directly and indirectly (Dailey, 2008).

A stimulating environment deals with the way children manipulate the environment to exercise and develop their abilities. The environment has a powerful effect on the development of child's competence. An environment responsive to the child's skills and stimulation, timed slightly ahead of the child's development level will accelerate a child's progress. Lack of stimulation and an unresponsive environment can hamper children's overall development (Manocha and Balda, 2011).

Gujjars are one of the most marginalised tribal populations of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. They form the third largest majority in the state and pursue pastoral life since ages. They follow their traditional occupation of rearing cattle, goats and sheep. Their conditions have remained unchanged and they follow mostly their traditional customs and face many problems especially in terms of unfavourable home environmental conditions (Kaur et al, 2003). However, over the last few decades, Gujjars like many other nomadic groups had to deal with rapid changes to their way of life. Though they continue to hold on to their culture quiet strongly, yet they are also started to derive benefits of acculturation atleast to some extent (UNESCO, 2011).

The findings of the present study highlight that in spite of their disadvantaged environment, the sample Gujjar preschoolers received adequate levels of stimulation. Majority of these children received 'moderate' levels of stimulation on both the dimensions namely language and encouragement for social maturity. This trend continued for both male as well as female children separately. Most mothers were verbally interactive with their children and maintained physical proximity with them. They were responsive and alert of their children's activities, yet most of them were providing inputs for language development and social maturity only upto a moderate level. Most of their homes were deprived of books, magazines, toys and other stimulating material and also encouragement for social development was more or less inadequate.

Though the quality of mother-child relationship was appreciable yet availability of a conducive environment for overall wholistic development was missing. Mothers of these children can be taught through intervention module, strategies for fostering language development and social maturity of their children. Especially the importance of enriched verbal exchange and indigenous use of locally available material can be promoted for ensuring wholistic development of the children.

This piece of work suggests that there can be improvement in their overall levels of stimulation so that parents could foster a warm and responsive relationship with their children by providing them more stimulating home environment to live and by carrying out some effective interventional programmes for the welfare of tribals comprising of children and parents/caregivers.

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