

In the heart of a lively village, near the *anganwadi*, an evening unfolds with groups of children engaging joyfully in different forms of play. Educators delight in observing their social participation. Different types of play – with objects, such as plastic cups; symbolic play in which they make different shapes with mud; games with rules, like *lagori*; socio-dramatic play – a group of children pretending to take out a ‘Ganesh procession’; and of course, physical play, like jumping, hopping and running – all of these showcase the richness of children’s imagination and their connection to local traditions. The scene is magical (*jaadui*).

The fundamental quality of the overall learning experience for young children is highly influenced by the way caregivers and teachers utilise materials in their classrooms and how children interact with one another. The role of materials and adults is crucial in play-based learning. Driven by curiosity, children explore objects and use materials based on their imagination, transforming seemingly unrelated items into meaningful play elements.

Jaadui Pitara

Jaadui Pitara (magic box) developed under NCF-FS is a box containing play-based teaching-learning materials (TLMs) tailored for children between the age group of 3-8 years. It supports ‘learning through play’ and is available in 13 Indian languages. It holds contextual and cultural significance for Indian children. State education departments are encouraged to develop a similar set of materials for the Foundational Stage, consistent with the state’s curriculum framework and syllabus, along with cultural and contextual relevance, giving due importance to traditional toys.

In the Foundational Stage, TLMs play a crucial role in making the teaching-learning process more interactive, engaging, and effective. They cater to the developmental needs of children by providing a multi-sensory and age-appropriate teaching and learning experience of developmental domains and foundational language and literacy, numeracy, and

understanding of the world around us (thematic content). The contents of the *Jaadui Pitara* support teaching methods in achieving a wide range of the curricular goals of NCF-FS.

Contents of the Jaadui Pitara

Enhanced play materials

Jaadui Pitara contains toys and play materials, like puzzles, blocks and puppets, for an active and developmentally-appropriate approach to learning that not only lays the foundation for academic skills but also nurtures essential social, emotional, cognitive abilities and sensory and perceptual skills in young learners. These objects enable children to explore and experience endless opportunities of learning and development based on their maturity level, with the support of teachers. They ensure a *stimulative learning environment*, making classrooms a lively experience with children given the freedom to choose and engage with play materials.

Building blocks and puzzles

Building blocks are known as ‘super toys’ due to their open-ended nature and endless possibilities of constructive play. Since children use their senses to discover how objects work and manipulate those objects, *constructive play* provides a preschool child with opportunities to develop the ability to classify, measure, order, count, and discern differences in relation to depth, width, length, symmetry, shape, and space. It also helps children’s imaginations and creativity.

Puppets and other toys

Puppets and toys, such as kitchen and doctor sets, encourage children to develop representation skills or representing one thing as another through imagination (socio-dramatic play and role-play by using materials and imitating voice and actions to imitate others), foster language abilities, socio-emotional awareness, and understanding of social roles and norms, thereby, helping children to make sense of the real world.

Table 1. Forms of play, supporting materials in the Jaadui Pitara and their significance.

Type of Play	Materials in Jaadui Pitara	Developmental opportunities, skills & competencies
Play with objects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cat puzzle • Threading 2-3D shapes • Stacking colour rings • Stacking rods & colour blocks • Tangram • <i>Ganith Mala</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensory motor skills, sensory perceptual skills • Exploring the properties of objects • Ability to classify, measure, order, count and compile differences in relation to depth, width, length, symmetry, shape and space
Dramatic play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitchen set • Mortar-pestle, knife and chopping board, <i>chakla-belan</i> • Hand puppets (crow, lion, donkey, rooster, elephant, shark) soft toys, rat puppet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication of ideas, feelings, and emotions • Appropriate social skills • Confidence to practise vocabulary and extend learning through new, related words • Practice for reading and writing skills • Solve problems and develop mathematical concepts • Cooperation with peers
Symbolic play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alphabet tracing board • Puppets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbolic systems, including spoken language, reading and writing, numbers, various visual media (painting, drawing, collage) music and so on • Making up new words and phonological awareness
Physical play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wooden top • Play dough • Threading beads • Ball • Skipping rope • <i>Lagori</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical well-being, gross and fine motor skills • Control, coordination and body balance • Understanding movement concepts (spatial and body parts)
Games with rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ashta Changa</i> • <i>Chowki Bara</i> • <i>Pallankuzhi Manne</i> • <i>Parecheesi</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of social skills, related to sharing, cooperation and taking turns • Understand others' perspective and • Problem-solving skills

Play books

Play books include illustrative, thematic activity sheets for the 3-6 years age group and Hindi, English and maths illustrative activities for age group 3-8 years.

These play books, besides making learning fun for children, also:

- Promote positive learning attitudes
- Encourage self-exploration and independent learning
- Provide concrete concepts through print representation
- Promote cognitive abilities and pre-numeracy and number concepts
- Develop fine motor skills, control coordination pasting, cutting, colouring, tracing etc.
- Support picture comprehension, vocabulary, pre-reading and writing skills with conventions of print
- Reinforce and provide practice of the concepts and skills that are experienced in the class/peer group/group activities to promote social development
- Promote smooth transition from age-appropriate, grade-level foundational competencies

The play books also help the teacher in many other ways:

- Support the teacher in building positive learning attitudes, learning experiences that are enjoyable and encouraging
- Facilitate and set an example for differentiated teaching, enable teachers to tailor activity sheets according to their students' pace and learning styles
- Facilitate in maintaining a tangible record of each child's progress, track developmental milestones and early learning outcomes
- Enable systematic documenting of children's activity sheets in portfolio

Apart from this, play books also facilitate and encourage parental involvement in children's development and learning with simple illustrative activity sheets. The activity sheets provide them with a clear insight into the progress of their children and facilitate continued learning at home.

Teacher handbooks

In the early Foundation Stage (children aged 3-6 years), there has been considerable uncertainty regarding the content for teachers to use with the children. To address this, *Jaadui Pitara* provides a set of teacher handbooks. These handbooks clearly

outline the scope of the thematic content and age-appropriate experiences. The *Khel Khel Mein* handbook is specifically designed for 3–6-year-olds, and there are others for Hindi, English and maths. A handbook for creating low- and no-cost teaching-learning materials (TLMs) is also provided.

Flash cards

There are 50 thematic flash cards with pictures of animals, plants, flowers and fruits, etc., that serve the following purposes:

- Engagement and interest: Capture and maintain children's interest by presenting information in a visually appealing and thematic manner
- Concept reinforcement: Reinforce thematic concepts and vocabulary, aiding in better retention and understanding
- Multi-sensory learning: Provide multi-sensory learning experiences involving sight and discussion to enhance understanding
- Language development: Support language development by introducing new words and facilitating free, guided, and conceptual conversation around specific themes
- Creativity and imagination: Encourage creativity and imagination through visual representation of thematic ideas



Figure 1. A child enjoys playing with the contents of the *Jaadui Pitara*.

Numeracy cards

There are numeracy cards (1-100) in two sets with number names and cardinal number dots mentioned on each that aid the following:

- Numeracy skill development: Visual representation of numbers, number names and associating numbers (symbols) with quantities
- Concrete (pictorial) understanding: Connecting abstract (numbers) with concrete symbols (dots).
- Sequential learning: Progressing from basic counting (1-10) for pre-primary to more complex calculations
- Interactive learning: Encouraging hands-on exploration of numbers and relating them to concrete experiences

Posters

Posters create a print-rich environment, complement classroom conversations, reading aloud, as well as the following with the teacher's support:

- Oral language development: Listening and responding, retelling, using talk and conversation and learning

- Print awareness: Associating spoken language with printed words, seeing interconnectedness between oral and written language
- Cultural experience: Introduction to diverse cultures, perspectives, and literary traditions through a variety of stories and poems
- Expression and communication: Encouraging discussions and other forms of sharing
- Reading with comprehension: Improving picture reading, word recognition and reading comprehension skills with stories and poems with accompanying visuals

Conclusion

Daily learning experiences that are child-led and teacher-directed through, thematic play materials, symbolic and dramatic play activities, as well as teacher-driven activities, are supported by resources, like teacher handbooks and teacher manuals. This approach is intended to promote 'playful teaching and learning' in the Foundational Stage. These, in turn, foster positive relationships to nurture children and plan experiences deeply connected to children's lives, context, and previous knowledge, incorporating local resources wherever possible.



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