

Pre School Education : An ICDS Evaluation of ASR blocks

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Abstract

Education is the way of life and that is also in the early years of a child proves the milestone of his/her essence of life. ICDS i.e. Integrated Child Development Services Scheme in India is also putting such milestones in the lives of Indian children with the help of various services covered under its umbrella including Pre School Education.

Method: A cross sectional study was undertaken in rural Anganwadi centres of Amritsar District of Punjab of India. Random Sampling and Purposive sampling techniques were used. Interview Schedules were prepared for anganwadi workers(AWW) and children of 4 to 6 years of age.

Results: The most prominent reason for children not attending AWCs in rural areas of Amritsar District is found to be lack of facilities at these centres. 73.11% children could count upto 20 only and no child could count upto 70. 44.81% children could not recite a single poem and 50.47% children could recite one or two poems only. All children were able to recognize few of their body parts. So far as percentage responses related to General Knowledge questions were concerned, no response in total could cross 50%.

Interpretations: Lack of facilities at AWCs and prejudices and biases among community are the prominent reasons of not all the beneficiaries attending AWCs. Moreover the children responses were found to be highly unsatisfactory in relation to the interview schedule. It is suggested that the strict actions should be taken by Government to ensure good teaching learning facilities at AWCs.

KEYWORDS: Pre School Education, ICDS, India, Amritsar, Early childhood growth and development, border area AWCs

Introduction

ICDS i.e. Integrated Child Development Services Scheme is India's answer to the problems associated with Early Childhood growth and development. The two core areas of concern are provision of supplementary nutrition and pre school education. The Scheme was launched in 1975 on 2nd of October. The scheme initially started with 4891 AWCs in 33 blocks in 1975 which gradually expanded to 13.49 lakhs operational AWCs in India by the year 2017 (WCD, 2017). The main features of the ICDS scheme are as follows:

- ⊙ The ICDS Scheme is one of the world's largest and unique programmes with special target on early childhood care and development under the patronage of India.
- ⊙ Children (0-6yrs) and Pregnant and Nursing mothers (15-45 yrs) are target population under the scheme.
- ⊙ The scheme aimed at carrying out PSE (Pre school education) activities at one hand and fighting health issues, infant mortality and malnutrition of the targeted population on the other.
- ⊙ There are 06 services provided under the scheme i.e. Pre-school non-formal education, Supplementary Nutrition, Nutrition & health education, Immunization, Health check-up and Referral services.
- ⊙ Centre and State Governments share the cost at 50:50 for Supplementary Nutrition and 90:10 for other expenditures. So far as NER i.e. North Eastern Region is concerned, it is 90:10 for all.

Rationale of the Study:

In order to provide Pre School education to 3 to 6 years children, AWCs are established throughout India. The main aim is to acquaint them with basics of 3 Rs for the sake of preparing them for primary classes. But the statistics show that irrespective of a number of facilities provided at AWCs including Charts, PSE kits, toys, Flash Cards, learning blocks, counting frames and meal etc., the most parents are unwilling to send their kids of 3 to 6 years for pre schooling at AWCs. The previous studies also reflect the same. In a study conducted by Ahmad et al in 2005, it was found that 43.77% children were eligible for non formal pre school education in his area of study but only 34.52% attend pre schooling at AWCs. Chudasama et al (2016) also found during his survey that only 14.6% of the AWCs reported 100% preschool education (PSE) coverage among children. Rest 55.4% reported an interruption in that. In order to find out the status of Pre School education component of ICDS in rural blocks of Amritsar District, the present study has been carried out.

Scope and Objectives:

In Amritsar District of Punjab, India, there are 1859 AWCs operational under 12 blocks with 1,76,048 Children (0-6yrs.), 28,579 Pregnant and Lactating Mothers and 59,048 Children (6 months-03 years) (MWCD,2017). The objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of PSE activities of AWCs on children in rural areas of Amritsar District. In this study, hence, PSE activities had been evaluated in terms of actual no. of children present on the day of visit, analyzing reasons for not attending PSE activities by the beneficiary children and assessing Children knowledge and understanding of basics as given in their curriculum with the help of an Interview schedule.

Methodology:

Universe: The universe of the study is AWWs teaching in rural AWCs of Amritsar District and children of 4 to 6 years of age studying in those rural AWCs.

Sample: 20% of the rural AWCs are selected as sample. AWWs teaching in these centres form the sample and it turned out to be 279. The children present on the day of visit of Investigator in these AWCs formed the another part of the sample of the study.

Time taken: Data was collected during the period of August 2016 to November 2017.

Techniques: Proportionate random sampling technique has been used to select AWCs and AWWs. Whereas purposive sampling is used to select children beneficiaries. 02 Interview schedules have been prepared i.e. one for AWWs and other for Children beneficiaries.

Table 1: Total Rural AWCs operational in Amritsar

Name of Blocks	Total No. of AWCs	Sample AWCs	Sample Children Beneficiaries
Ajnala	252	50	80
Chogawan	167	33	60
Harsha Chhina	116	23	35
Jandiala Guru	123	24	30
Majitha	214	42	50
Rayya	186	37	70
Tarsika	145	29	42
Verka	140	28	36
Attari	65	13	21
Total	1408	279	424

The interview schedule for children beneficiaries was prepared on the basis of prescribed curriculum as given by Department of Women and Child Development. The interview schedule was pretested on a sample of 40 Children beneficiaries studying in rural AWCs. Reliability was measured through test-retest method and Test retest correlation turned out to be .865 which was highly significant. Face validity was established through expert review method.

In addition to this, a triangulation approach had been used to collect and analyse data. Observational Analysis was also done. The data collected was analyzed and tabulated with the help of SPSS 21 version.

Analysis and Interpretations:

The results obtained through triangulation approach has been presented in the following tables and discussed as under. The first table i.e. Table 2 is based on the views of AWWs obtained through interview schedule so as to find out why not all the children in their areas are attending AWCs.

Table 2: Reason for not attending AWCs by the beneficiary children (Percentage response of AWWs)

Responses Blocks	AWC is far off	People do not like facilities at AWC	People do not like sending children to Pre schools	Prejudices and biasness related to caste, class and gender etc.	Total
Ajnala	16	64	-	20	100
Chogawan	-	75.76	-	24.24	100
Harsha Chhina	8.69	69.56	-	21.75	100
Jandiala Guru	8.33	62.5	-	29.17	100
Majitha	-	71.43	-	28.57	100
Rayya	8.11	81.08	-	10.81	100
Tarsika	-	86.21	-	13.79	100
Verka	7.14	85.71	-	7.15	100
Attari	-	76.92	-	23.08	100
Total	6.10	74.19	-	19.71	100

It is quite clear from the table 2 that the most prominent reason why people do not prefer their kids to attend AWCs is that they do not like facilities over there. The second main reason termed out to be prejudices and biases etc. and it figured out to be 19.71%. AWC is not far off for most of the people. So it also came out to be one of the cause but just 6.10%.

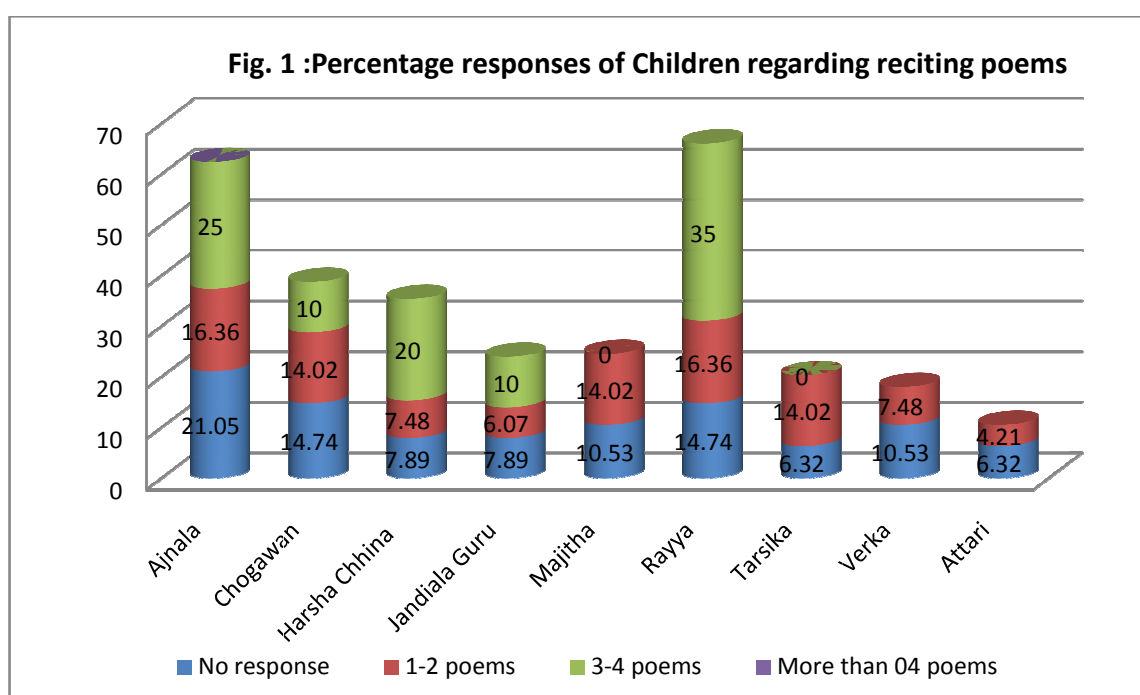
The next tables are based on children response to the Interview Schedule related to various PSE activities i.e. in terms of basic mathematical and verbal skills and knowledge.

Table 3: Percentage responses of Children regarding counting numbers

Responses Blocks	No Response	Upto 20	Upto 40	Upto 70	Total
Ajnala	12.05	20.97	16.13	-	18.87
Chogawan	10.84	14.19	22.58	-	14.15
Harsha Chhina	12.05	6.45	16.13	-	8.25
Jandiala Guru	6.02	8.06	-	-	7.08
Majitha	12.05	12.90	-	-	11.79
Rayya	24.10	12.90	32.26	-	16.51

Tarsika	7.23	9.68	19.35	-	9.91
Verka	8.43	9.35	-	-	8.49
Attari	9.64	4.19	-	-	4.95
Total	19.58	73.11	7.31	-	100

From Table 3, it is quite evident that nearly 2/3rd of the children could count upto 20 in AWCs whereas only 7.31% could count upto 40 and 19.58% did not give any response to the counting question. The condition of Ajnala block is better so far as counting response upto 20 is concerned but Rayya block scores more if we consider counting upto 40. In nearly 04 blocks i.e. Jandiala Guru, Majitha, Verka and Attari, not even a single child could count upto 40.



It is quite clear from the figure that highest no. of children who could recite 3-4 poems belonged to rayya district i.e. 35% only. 25% children of ajnala block could recite 3-4 poems and scored second place in that. In total, 44.81% of the children show no response to the question related to the poem recitation. Whereas only 50.47% of the children could recite one or two poems and only 4.72% could recite 3 or 4 poems. The condition is worst in case of Verka and attari where only 7.48% and 4.21% of the children could recite 1 or 02 poems respectively.

Table 4: Percentage response of Children regarding recognition of body parts

Responses Blocks	No Response	Less than 5	5-9	More than 9	Total
Ajnala	-	19.72	8.33	55.56	18.87
Chogawan	-	13.52	20	-	14.15
Harsha Chhina	-	8.45	8.33	-	8.25
Jandiala Guru	-	6.20	13.33	-	7.08
Majitha	-	11.27	10	44.44	11.79
Rayya	-	19.15	3.33	-	16.51
Tarsika	-	9.01	16.67	-	9.91
Verka	-	8.17	11.67	-	8.49
Attari	-	4.51	8.33	-	4.95
Total	-	83.73	14.15	2.12	100

From table 4, it is evident that 83.73% children in total in rural areas of Amritsar District could recognize less than 5 body parts. It was good to get 100% response at least in this case. Every child was able to recognize few body parts like eye, nose, tongue and ear etc. Only 2.12% children could recognize more than 9 body parts and they belong to only two blocks i.e. Ajnala and Majitha.

Table 5: Percentage responses of children to G.K. questions of the Interview Schedule

Responses Blocks	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Ajnala	1.65	4.72	-	-	3.54	-	-	-	1.18	3.54
Chogawan	0.47	2.83	-	-	3.30	-	-	-	0.94	2.36
Harsha Chhina	0.71	2.36	-	-	2.36	-	-	-	0.72	2.12
Jandiala Guru	1.41	1.18	-	-	9.43	-	-	-	-	1.42
Majitha	0.94	1.42	-	-	4.82	-	-	-	-	3.30
Rayya	-	0.71	-	-	2.83	-	-	-	1.89	1.18
Tarsika	1.18	0.94	-	-	2.12	-	-	-	1.89	3.07
Verka	-	0.71	-	-	1.42	-	-	-	-	0.94
Attari	-	0.47	-	-	2.59	-	-	-	-	0.47
Total	6.37	14.86	-	-	32.08	-	-	-	6.60	15.57

Table 5 gives glimpse of percentage responses of children to General Knowledge based questions of the Interview schedule which were taken from their prescribed curriculum. Q1(Question 1) belonged to singing of National Anthem and in total only, 6.37% of the children knew the National Anthem i.e. Jan Gan Man. Q2 belonged to counting of Table 2 and only 14.86% of the children could recall Table 2. Q3 asked children to count Table 3 and alas to say that no child could do that. Q4 was concerned with ‘What does animal need to live’ and here also the situation remained the same. Q5 asked children ‘What does plant need to live’ and only 32.08% children could answer that. Q6 was concerned with counting of months in a year and no children from any block answered that. Q7 asked ‘what does a carpenter do’ and in situation remained same with zero response. Q8 asked children about President of India and it really desperate to know that nobody knew about them. Q9 asked about capital of Punjab. In total, 6.60% children knew about that. Q10 asked about the name of Anganwadi worker itself and in total only 15.57% children could tell the name of their teacher. In this also, maximum responses came from Jandiala Guru and Ajnala blocks and least responses came from Verka and Attari blocks.

Discussion and Conclusion:

ICDS is a community based and community targeted programme with main aim to fight with malnutrition and illiteracy in the very early years of life of a child. The programme intervenes when a child enters in the womb of her mother. It is meant to be so as to support quality life of people in their later years as adults. The aim is to create more useful human assets of nation. But it seems to be a distant dream if we analyse the above findings:

- The children are not attending AWCs due to lack of various facilities over there (Table 1). These facilities which are lacking range from normal chair table for sitting a child in classroom for study to permanent building for the classrooms. The other facilities like provision of PSE kits and play material etc. hold no good if Government doesn't provide a permanent building for AWCs.
- Only 73.11% children could count upto 20. Moreover not even a single child could count upto 70 (Table 3) which they should have done as per their curriculum set by MWCD. Counting is very basics of mathematical abilities to be developed in a child. If a child is not able to do simple counting, how shall he/she be able to perform higher mathematical functions?
- Children from any block could not recite more than 04 poems though any poem in or outside the curriculum were being given consideration.(Fig.1) There are 05 poems mentioned in the curriculum and 50.47% could recite one or two poems but in reality, except 05 children, all other children recited poems other than those mentioned in their curriculum.
- It was good to figure out that all children could recognize nearly 5 of their body parts like ear, nose, tongue and head etc.(Table 4) But not all body parts could be recognized by children though the chart showing body parts was hanging on the walls of almost every AWCs.
- If we see the responses of children to general knowledge base questions, the situation is even more tight. There were 10 questions catering to different yet important GK based routine questions. But alas to say that responses obtained

were not much satisfactory. Singing National Anthem daily in the morning is part of curriculum of AWCs but only 6.37% children knew about National Anthem. It was surprising to observe that all children were able to sing 'rehaas' in place of National Anthem and most AWCs were also singing them along the same.

- Children even didn't know the name of the president of the country. They knew the name of their parents. But most didn't even know the name of their Anganwadi teacher because they were never told so.(Table 5)

It has been found that many children could not answer many questions though they were part of their syllabus. Because they were not taught so in the classrooms. After investigation, it was also found that most of the Anganwadi workers did not have syllabus with them. So they were not performing curriculum based activities in their classrooms. Hence the need of the hour is that Government should make availability of PSE curriculum to all the AWCs so that the AWCs could teach as per syllabus to children. Also the need of facilities like sitting furniture, space and permanent building etc. should be fulfilled so as to ensure smooth functioning of AWCs. It is only then Government of India will be able to meet its targets of providing nutrition and education to all in real sense.

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