

Pre-School education in Delhi, India: Interventions and challenges

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ABSTRACT: *While India is undergoing a swift expansion in secondary education, there has also been a drift of demand towards preschool education as a large number of parents are opting for it for their little ones. In India, the provision of preschool education is being made by the government, non-government organizations as well as the private sector through diverse models. Due to a variety of reasons such as working mothers, nuclear families, there is increasing enrolment in stand-alone playschools as well as kindergarten sections to facilitate education due to early stimulation, promote development activities and support to parents and families (Rao, 2005; World Bank, 2006; Paltasingh, 2010; Kaushal, 2016). However, in terms of the numbers, the prime coverage of 3- to 6-year-old children is being provided through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) set up by the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme. The ICDS is offered under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), India. This research paper is based upon a study, objectives of which were to uncover the infrastructure, curriculum, support materials, existing practices in early childhood education (ECE) available in the diverse type of ECE centres situated in Delhi, India. It was found that the nutritional component being there in AWC makes them attractive as there are free meals and snacks. On the other hand, in the preschools, the educational infrastructure is better as the teaching and learning materials are replenished and added on, and also the teachers are better qualified. The absence of these components often inhibits the attainment of the desired objectives. So, the aspects in terms of human and physical infrastructure also need to be given due weightage along with nutrition. It is recommended that preschools and AWCs should be linked to the primary schools, physically and programmatically.*

KEYWORDS: Anganwadi Centre (AWC), Anganwadi Worker (AWW), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Preschool.

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1. Introduction

Children under six years of age need to be given special attention as children in this age range learn and grow at a faster pace. The experience-based brain development in early life can have an impact on the health, behaviour, learning ability, cognitive, psychomotor as well as social competencies throughout life (Mustard, 2007). The ECCE plays a positive role in promoting enrolment, reduction in drop-out and greater retention in primary schooling (NIPCCD, 1993, 1995, 2003; NCERT, 2006; Paltasingh, 2010).

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is more than preparation for primary school. There is a common misperception that ECE is only about learning basic skills; however, according to

studies, it is so much more than that. It is a time when children learn critical social and emotional skills and a partnership is formed between the child, its parents and the teacher and thus lays a good foundation to carry on throughout the child's education. ECCE, according to UNESCO (2019) aims at the "holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing".

ECCE also has the possibility to nurture caring, capable and responsible future citizens. Keeping in view the importance of ECCE, UNESCO (2019) is of the view that ECCE is one of the best investments a country can make to promote human resource development, gender equality and social cohesion, and to reduce

the costs for later remedial programmes. For disadvantaged children, ECCE plays an important role in compensating for the disadvantages in the family and combating educational inequalities. This approach is reinforced in the Education 2030 agenda and in particular in target 4.2 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 which aims that “by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. At present, nations around the world including India are becoming aware of the importance of ECE. This research paper is based upon a study, objectives of which were to uncover the infrastructure, curriculum, support materials, existing practices in ECE available in the diverse type of ECE Centres situated in Delhi, India. The findings of the study are expected to enhance the quality of these programmes by suggesting measures for improvement.

1.1. Review of related literature and studies

As per Article 39 of the Indian Constitution, children should receive opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner with freedom and dignity. The Directive Principle under Article 45 of the Constitution of India says that the States shall provide free and compulsory education to all children until they complete 14 years of age. In addition to such provision for Primary Education, the State shall also provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years. The National Policy of Education (1986) emphasized the ECCE as an important tool to facilitate primary education. In the year 2013, National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy was approved by the Government of India. This Policy framework also included the National ECCE Curriculum Framework and Quality Standards for ECCE. The Policy gave commitments to universal access to the provision of quality ECE to all children under the age of six years.

In India, the provision of preschools is being made by both the government as well as the private sector through manifold models. However, in terms of the numbers, the prime coverage of

3-to-6-year old's is being provided by the ICDS programme. The ICDS is under the MWCD. The ICDS is an important scheme so far as the provision of services for children under six years is concerned. ICDS works through a network of Anganwadi Centers (AWC) which have a play centre or a childcare centre located within them. These centres are run by Anganwadi Workers (AWW) and Anganwadi Helpers (AWH).

There are many challenges posed in ongoing efforts pertaining to universalization. The country has made major reforms in education by coming up with the National Education Policy 2020, the first education policy of the 21st century that proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure including its regulation and governance. Under the new policy, the old pattern of 10+2 class structure in school education will be replaced with a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18 that lays great emphasis on ECCE (3-6 years). Currently, children in the age group of 3 to 6 years are not covered in the 10+2 structure as Class 1 begins at age of 6 years. In the new 5+3+3+4 structure, a strong base of ECCE from the age of 3 years is also included, which is aimed at promoting better overall learning, development, and well-being. One of the goals of NEP 2020 is to ensure universal access to high-quality ECCE across the country in a phased manner. Special attention and priority will be given to districts/ locations that are particularly socio-economically disadvantaged. For universal access to ECCE, anganwadis (i.e., ECE centres under ICDS) shall be fully integrated into school complexes/clusters. Access to pre-school education needs to be improved as the initial years of a child are crucial and cognitive, and intellectual developments take place during these years. Prior to the age of five (that is before class 1), every child has to attend a pre-preparatory class for one year. One of the important issues regarding access is to provide space for pre-school education in primary schools for which either new early childhood centres/ preschools need to be opened or pre-school sections or AWCs can be integrated with existing formal schools.

According to the Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE) data (2018-19), the number of children receiving preschool education in diverse types of schools is 1,19,30,307 and out of these 45.70 percent are girls and 54.3 percent are boys, signifying substantial gender gap in enrolment. Notwithstanding this extensive coverage, a good number of primary schools (7,01,537) are yet to be covered for pre/primary sections or preparatory classes (Table 1).

The latest National Sample Survey - 75th round data (Government of India, 2019) indicated that around 5.7 percent of children of its total sample were availing pre-primary education. It was also noted that pre-school education facility was available in nearly in all private schools. Furthermore, it was found that around 55.2 percent of children were availing the unaided private pre-primary schools and around 12 percent were enrolled in private aided schools. Though a higher share of pre-school goes attended the private schools, it was noted that “the private providers are largely unregulated. So, there is a need to have a regulatory body for the maintenance of the quality of pre-school education” (Government of India, 2019). The proportion of children attending pre-primary education in government schools was found to be merely 32.7 percent indicating variation in access to schooling by management of schools at this stage.

Participation of children in pre-primary education in India has improved significantly in the last two decades. Their participation is found to be affected by socio-economic factors like social group, locations of centres, parental education, household income, economic status, and straggler status of the state (Kaul & Sankar, 2009; Kaushal, 2019). There are continuous and cumulative socio-cultural and economic exclusion factors like poverty, the compulsion among older girls to look after their families and younger siblings, some myths and beliefs faced by poor children influencing their ability to complete the primary schooling (Ramachandran et al., 2003; Singh, 2011).

There has been a massive expansion in the number of Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) in the country. Certain provisions through this programme facilitate early stimulation, promote development activities and support to parents and families (Rao, 2005; World Bank, 2006; Paltasingh, 2010; Kaushal, 2016). The percentage of primary schools (33.71), with an attached private primary section under private management, is higher than the percentage of schools (22.70) under government management (Mehta, 2010). It indicates that the early intervention in childcare is given less attention for the marginalized and economically less affluent children. Kaushal (2019) in her research study found that the franchise preschools in Delhi were

Table 1: Key statistics pertaining to position of pre-school education in India

| Data Pertaining to | Number | Source |
|--|-------------|--|
| No. of operational AWC | 13,77,595 | ICDS report updated as on 30th June 2019 |
| Child population of 3-6 years age | 3,05,09,301 | ICDS report updated as on 30th June 2019 |
| Number of AWW/ teachers | 13,77,595 | ICDS report updated as on 30th June 2019 |
| Total number of schools | 11,68,292 | UDISE (2018-19) (Provisional) |
| Number of schools with primary sections | 8,26,842 | UDISE+ 2018-19 (Provisional) |
| Number of primary schools with pre-primary sections | 1,94,768 | UDISE+ 2018-19 (Provisional) |
| Number of schools to be covered for preparatory class | 7,01,537 | Schools excluded having already pre-primary sections |
| Total No. of children enrolled in the attached pre-primary section | 29,94,751 | UDISE 2017-18 (Provisional) |

Source: NCERT and MHRD, New Delhi, India

providing a variety of programmes of diverse nomenclatures such as toddler programme, playschool, nursery, junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten entry to which was specified by age level.

ECE is more than preparation for primary school. Early childhood is the time when children learn critical social and emotional skills and a partnership is formed between the child, their parents and the teacher and thus lays a good foundation to carry on throughout the child's education. Therefore, it is essential to have serious deliberations on how a sustainable future can be achieved with the right priorities and investments for quality ECE. A strong footing of elementary education can be built only on a strong foundation of ECE in the country. This strong foundation can be ensured by providing quality ECE services for the children. Therefore, it is important to examine the current status of ECE programmes and investigate the quality of provisions provided by them.

2. Methodology

For conducting the present study, Delhi was chosen because it being an Educational Hub and national Capital attracts people from almost all States as well as from a number of other countries. As per the census (2011), there are more than 2 million children in the age group of 0 to 6 years in Delhi. In Delhi, there are 10,000 plus AWCs

that have been established under Integrated Child Development Scheme. These AWC's serve to provide care and preschool education to the children.

The Delhi government has also opened "modern anganwadi hub centres" for children from economically disadvantaged families. The Delhi Government has preschools in its Municipal Corporation-run schools. There are private preschools, Balwadi (run by Government & also NGOs), creches involved in ECE, AWCs run by ICDS and also NGOs are also offering preschool education. In order to understand the structure and function of preschool programmes in Delhi, it is important to study all the kinds of programmes, i.e., preschools (public, private and NGO) and AWC.

The broad methodology adopted was survey research. However, both qualitative and quantitative approach was followed based on the requirement. The details of sampling frame, with categories of sampling units, have been presented in tabular form (Table 2 & 3). Data was collected from four districts of Delhi. Two tehsils of each district were chosen for data collection. Tehsil is a sub-district of each district.

As the sector is unorganized in the private segment, a list of total preschools was not available. The list of preschools was compiled by the researcher from different sources. From the list, 15 private preschools and 10 NGO-run

Table 2: District-wise number of preschools and AWCs visited

| Synod | Name of the District | Name of Tehsil | No. of Preschools | No. of AWC |
|-------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 1 | East Delhi | Gandhi Nagar | 5 | 3 |
| | | Vivek Vihar | 5 | 3 |
| 2 | North East Delhi | Seema Puri | 5 | 3 |
| | | Seelampur | 5 | 3 |
| 3 | North Delhi | Sadar Bazar | 5 | 3 |
| | | Kotwali | 5 | 3 |
| 4 | South West Delhi | Delhi Contonement | 5 | 3 |
| | | Najafgarh | 5 | 3 |
| Total | Four Districts | 08 Blocks | 40 | 24 |

Note: Tehsil is a Sub Unit of a District

Table 3: Sample distribution

| No. | Sampling Unit | Total Number Selected |
|-----|---|------------------------------|
| 1 | No. of Tehsils covered | 8 (2 from each district 2x4) |
| 2 | No. of AWCs | 24 (3 from each tehsil 8x3) |
| 3 | No. of other preschools (MCD+ Private preschools+ NGO run preschools) | 40 (5 from each tehsil 8x5) |
| 4 | No. of Community Members | 128 (2 from each 64 x 2) |
| 5 | Teachers | 64 |

preschools and 15 Delhi Government Schools with pre-primary sections were selected to constitute the sample of preschools. Data was collected from selected preschool teachers, anganwadi workers, community members, with a personal visit to each centre.

Following the multi-stage sampling procedure, five preschools and three AWCs from each tehsil were selected. All the 40 preschool teachers and 24 AWWs were interviewed. Approximately 2 community members from each preschool and anganwadi were approached to ascertain their perception and evaluation of the preschool interventions (Table 3).

All the preschools and AWCs were visited. The observation technique was followed to examine different dimensions of child-friendly education parameters. As per the requirement of the study, different tools, i.e., observation Schedule for the preschool/ AWCs and also the children in them, interview schedule and questionnaire for preschool teachers/ AWWs, interview schedule for community members were used for data collection.

3. Results

Functioning of preschools and AWCs with respect to the Early Childhood Education component was studied in terms of, infrastructure, cleanliness, curriculum component, participation of the children and various problems faced by the staff because of non-availability of resources. Each component is discussed and analysed subsequently.

3.1. Infrastructure in Preschool and AWCs

A study by NIPCCD has emphasized the

importance of the adequacy of infrastructure facilities in elementary education (NIPCCD, 1995). The adequate number of classrooms, activity rooms for staff members and appropriate space for outdoor and indoor activities of children were found as major infrastructural requirements of pre-primary education that affect the ECCE environment (Sultana, 2009). The existing condition of pre-primary schools in the Papumpare District of Arunachal Pradesh, India was not found to be satisfactory in terms of infrastructure, programme, records and registers (Hangsing, 2011). The provision of infrastructure was found to be significant in determining children's enrolment and attendance. Provision of certain infrastructure in the visited centres like playgrounds, drinking water, toilet, game and play instruments, instructional materials, nutrition programme and health check-ups were identified in the present study (Table 4).

There was an attempt to identify the required infrastructure in each of the selected districts.

East Delhi district

50 percent of preschools and all the anganwadi were in rented buildings. It was found that in 50 percent of the preschools there was a small playground for the children. None of the AWCs had a playground. In some of the preschools' space for playground was not provided to the preschools though, but co-incidentally, there was space for the children to play in front of the centre. Drinking water and toilet facility was found to be available in all of the visited preschools and AWCs. Provision of game and play instruments was found to be available only in all the preschools. The same provision was found to be available in 83.3 percent of AWCs.

Table 4: Infrastructure available in preschools and AWCs

| Available Facilities | Preschools | | | AWCs | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | East Delhi (%) | North (%) | North East Delhi (%) | South West Delhi (%) | North Delhi (%) | North East Delhi (%) | South West Delhi (%) |
| Rented | 5 (50.0) | 5 (40.0) | 4 (50.0) | 5 (50.0) | 6 (100) | 6 (100) | 6 (100) |
| Playground | 5 (50.0) | 2 (20.0) | 3 (30.0) | 2 (20.0) | 1 (16.67) | --- | 1 (16.67) |
| Drinking Water | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 6 (100.0) | 6 (100.0) | 6 (100.0) |
| Toilet facility | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 5 (100.0) | 5 (100.0) | 5 (100.0) |
| Game & Play instruments | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 5 (83.33) | 5 (83.3) | 5 (83.33) |
| Instructional materials | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 10 (100.0) | 6 (100) | 6 (100) | 6 (100) |
| Nutrition programme | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) | 6 (100) | 6 (100) | 6 (100) |
| Regular health check-up | 2 (20.0) | 1 (10.0) | 3 (30.0) | 1 (10.0) | 5 (83.33) | 3 (50.0) | 5 (83.33) |

Source: Field data

All the preschools had instructional materials while 83.3 percent of AWCs had instructional materials for the children. With regard to food and nutrition, none of the preschools had such facilities whereas all children of AWCs were provided food and nutrition in all the visited centres (Table-4). Facilities of regular health check-ups were extended to all the AWCs. These health check-up facilities were available in few preschools (20%) in the East Delhi district.

North East Delhi district

Half of the preschools and all the anganwadi were in rented buildings. Out of the visited centres, in 30 percent of preschools, there were playground facilities for the children. None of the AWCs had a playground, drinking water and toilet facility was available in all of the visited preschools and AWCs. The provision of games and play instruments was available in all of the preschools, whereas the same provision was found to be available in 83.3 percent of AWCs. All preschools and all the AWCs had instructional materials for the children. With regard to food and nutrition, none of the preschools had such

facilities whereas all children of AWCs were provided food and nutrition in the centres. It was found that facilities of regular health check-ups were being provided and used in half of the visited AWCs and in few preschools (30%) in the North East Delhi district.

North Delhi district

In North Delhi District, 20 percent of preschools and 17 percent of AWCs had playground facilities for the children in terms of open space in front of the AWCs. 40 percent of preschools and all the anganwadi were in rented buildings. Drinking water and toilet facility was found to be available in all the visited preschools and AWCs.

The provision of games and play instruments was found in all of the preschools, whereas it was available in 83.3 percent of the AWCs. All the preschools and AWC had instructional materials for children. With regard to food and nutrition, none of the preschools had such facilities whereas all AWCs were providing food and nutrition for the children. The facility of regular health check-ups was provided in 10% of the preschools and 83.3 percent of the AWCs (Table-4).

South West Delhi district

50 percent of preschools and all the anganwadi were in rented buildings. It was found that the facility of regular health check-ups was extended to 83.3 percent of the AWCs in the South West Delhi district while it was available only in 10 percent of the preschools. Out of all the visited centres, only a few of the preschools (20%) and AWCs (17%) had playground facilities. Drinking water and toilet facility was found available in all preschool and AWCs. Provision of game and play instruments was found in all of the preschools whereas the same provision was found to be available in most of the AWCs (83.3%). All the preschools and AWCs had had instructional materials for children. With regard to food and nutrition, none of the preschools had such facilities whereas all children of the AWCs were provided food and nutrition in the centres.

3.2. Cleanliness

Cleanliness plays an important role in the maintenance of proper health of the children. There had been studies that had reported poor status of cleanliness in the pre-school centres (Ramachandran et al, 2003). There was an attempt to find out the status of cleanliness in the visited centres (Table 5).

Table 5: Cleanliness of the centres

| Cleanliness of the Centre | | Preschool | AWCs |
|---------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| East Delhi | Good | 6 (60.00) | 2 (33.33) |
| | Average | 3 (30.00) | 4 (66.67) |
| | Bad | 1 (10.00) | 0 (0.00) |
| North East Delhi | Good | 6 (60.00) | 1(16.67) |
| | Average | 2 (20.00) | 5(83.33) |
| | Bad | 2 (20.00) | 0 (0.00) |
| North Delhi | Good | 4 (40.00) | 2 (33.33) |
| | Average | 5 (50.00) | 4 (66.67) |
| | Bad | 1 (10.00) | 0 (0.00) |
| South West Delhi | Good | 4 (40.00) | 2 (33.33) |
| | Average | 6 (60.00) | 4 (66.67) |
| | Bad | 0 (0.00) | 0 (0.00) |

Source: Field data

Based on the personal visit, it was observed that in the East Delhi district more than half of the preschools (60%) and about one-third of the AWCs (33%) were found to be well cleaned. In the North East Delhi district, cleanliness was well maintained in more than half of the preschools (60%) and in only one of the AWCs (17%). However, in North Delhi and South West Delhi Districts, cleanliness was finely maintained in some of the preschools and AWCs (33 percent).

It was found that in most of the visited AWCs (80%) and preschools (33%) there was no proper supervision and monitoring in maintaining the infrastructure and cleanliness.

3.3. Curriculum in Preschools & Anganwadi Centres

The curriculum in early childhood education is meant for conveying school-readiness skills and behaviours that facilitate children's entry into primary school (UNESCO, 2007). The need for an appropriate curriculum has been reiterated through the National Curriculum Framework - 2005. Curriculum for children under six years should be aimed at their better cognitive development, language development, socio-emotional development, physical and motor development, development of creativity and inculcation of healthy habits. In a study conducted by the NCERT (1998), it was found that in almost all the selected anganwadi centres, there was a virtual absence of any play activities.

The Government of Delhi has developed a unique curriculum for preschool education with the help of the state-level body SCERT. This curriculum is used across all the districts in the MCD run schools. The curriculum for Anganwadi has been developed by ICDS in collaboration with NGOS of the government-managed MCD centres for engaging the children in different activities. The preschool component in some of the AWCs was also found to be executed by active tie-ups with NGOs and HUBs which were acting as ECCE centres. The pre-school education kit was also being provided to these AWCs. The curriculum is theme-based and contains rhymes, some games and daily activities to be followed by the ECE teacher and AWC worker.

Table 6: Usage of rhymes, storytelling and conversation in the classroom by teachers/ AWWs

| No. | Response | Number of AWC+ Preschools | Percentage (%) |
|-------|----------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Yes | 64 | 100 |
| 2 | No | Nil | - |
| Total | | 64 | 100 |

Source: Field data

The information regarding the transaction strategies adopted by the teachers and AWWs was also obtained from all of them. All of the teachers and anganwadi workers stated that they were teaching rhymes, storytelling and conversation in the class (Table 6). It is learnt that at the initial stage, the children are taught listening skills. They teach them rhymes and singing. Children are being taught to converse using simple sentences of telling their names, age and so on. According to them, the teaching - learning is mostly ways of playing, and slowly children are taught on how to hold their pencils. It was reported that by the end of the academic year children are able to tell their names, parents' names, siblings' names, etc. Children are also able to converse freely with their peers and are able to cope up with the outside environment. But in general, it was observed that the AWCs were not providing opportunities to take initiatives during the activities.

The private pre-schools and NGOs made an initiative to be different and followed their own curriculum as some of them even claimed that they were implementing a highly researched curriculum which was having certain innovative child-centred concepts. As per them, this well-researched curriculum was facilitating maximum learning and development. The preschools were designing their own worksheets, preschool kits containing audio - video programmes, specially designed activities. One of the innovative practices was a celebration of colour days in which children had to wear dresses of the same colour and the classroom was also decorated as per the colour theme for making them learn colours. Some private preschools were following

the Montessori system of education while some preschools had gone beyond the dominion of Montessori-based curriculum and were following Reggio Emilia, thoughts of Sri Aurobindo. It was also observed that there was in general good provision for the development of the children's social skills in most of the private preschools (80%) and many of the government preschools (70%). However, all of the AWCs had very little provision of opportunities for children in terms of the development of their social skills.

In some of the private preschools (20%) the state of affairs was not that good. As in contrast to the above-mentioned curricular inputs, some of the private preschools were academically oriented and emphasized the learning of 3R's in their programme. The curriculum was observed to be a downward extension of the primary classes. It included no or very limited child-oriented activities in the curriculum. In addition, a few private preschools did not consider 'play' as important for the development of the children and thus did not give much importance to it in their curriculum. These preschools claimed that by the virtue of exposure to 3R's their preschool children were able to get admission in good schools. But one very important factor in conducting the activities is sufficient play space within the classroom. In many of the anganwadi (70%) and preschools (30%), the classroom space was just enough for all children attending to sit in one room but not enough for activities.

3.4. Participation of children

Participation of the children from both the categories of pre-school centres was studied and the data is presented in Table 7. Variation in the participation of the children in classroom activities was reported from all the four visited districts.

Simply delineated, **participation** in the **classroom** is the act of involvement of the children in the activities in the activities that are conducted in the class. The participation among the children was measured under two broad categories viz. active and passive. Unlike the passive participation, the activities that involved the active participation of children were those that gave sufficient space to children in terms

Table 7: Participation of children in classroom activities

| District Name | Participation in Classroom | Preschool Centres (N) | (%) | AWCs (n) | (%) |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------|----------|-------|
| East Delhi | Active | 7 | 70.00 | 1 | 16.67 |
| | Passive | 3 | 30.00 | 5 | 83.33 |
| North East Delhi Active | | 6 | 60.00 | 0 | -- |
| | Passive | 4 | 40.00 | 6 | 100 |
| North Delhi | Active | 5 | 50.00 | 1 | 16.67 |
| | Passive | 5 | 50.00 | 5 | 83.33 |
| South West Delhi | Active | 7 | 70.00 | 2 | 33.33 |
| | Passive | 3 | 30.00 | 4 | 66.67 |

Source: Field Data

so choosing from available activities, materials, and experiences for substantial portions of the day. Unlike the passive participation, the active participation also involved meaningful, learner-centred experiences; opportunities to touch and also learn from mistakes, manipulate, and experiment; opportunities to ask questions, solve problems, and think independently. The active participation was also characterized by a range of expectations for all children that involve opportunities to make decisions and to be creative and also were characterized by giving respect and trust to the children.

As can be seen, active participation was found among the children from the preschools in 70 percent of centres in South West Delhi and East Delhi district, 60 percent in North East district and 50 percent in North Delhi district. On the other hand, in the case of AWCs, active participation of children was found in 17 percent centres of East Delhi and North Delhi district, 33 percent centres of South West Delhi district. However, the situation was a bit disappointing in case of North East Delhi as in none of the AWCs there was any kind of active participation. The active participation of more children in preschools rather than Anganwadis perhaps is directly linked to the better qualified-teachers in the former. Most of the preschool teachers (72%) were better qualified than AWWs. But another factor that might be affecting the active participation of the children could be the irregular and insufficient salary which was identified as the major factor that was

responsible for demotivation of the preschool teachers with their jobs.

4. Conclusions and policy implications

4.1. Location of the building

In North East Delhi some of the preschools were located in extremely crowded localities that could be considered as not suitable for running the preschool. In North East Delhi was very scattered and many preschools were located in unhygienic areas. As per the census of India (2011) also the North East Delhi is having the population density among the districts of Delhi. It is desirable that the preschools should be located in a safe place near the home of the children. Another important aspect is that this also facilitates the parents because if the AWC or preschool is near the home then the parents can easily pick and drop children from the preschool. Safety concerns of the location are very important and they cannot be blatantly ignored in some of the preschools.

4.2. Infrastructure and support practices

All of the AWCs and nearly half of the preschools, were functioning in a rented building. But the preschools had more classrooms while the anganwadi were functioning in a single room, from which they were carrying out all kinds of activities such as providing preschool education to the children and also the referral services for the mother and the child. Basic amenities like toilet facilities and drinking water was available to all children. Anganwadi usually operated in

one room, where they carried out all the functions pertaining to the provision of care and education. So, in a way the activities pertaining to providing early stimulation and readiness were getting affected as the sufficient space was not there. With regard to food and nutrition none of the preschools had such facilities whereas in AWCs, provision of food was not a problem because mid-day meals were provided to all children from the ICDS.

4.3. Play space and equipment

In some of the AWCs (70 %) and preschool (30%), the classroom space was just enough for all attending children to sit in one room but not enough for activities. Some of the private preschools and the NGOs were trying to create their own niche in terms of infrastructure for games and play. They were designing their own educational kit, worksheets and play material. There was a little difference between the provisions provided by the preschools and AWCs as in three of the districts of Delhi the preschools were little better in terms of provision of a playground and also, they were all equipped in terms of adequate quantity and variety of games and play material unlike the AWCs. The play and instructional materials such as slates, charts, etc. were supplied only once to all the AWCs while preschools were getting/purchasing them from time to time. Another unacceptable fact was that the AWC had very few books that were required for the activities pertaining to functional literacy and numeracy.

4.4. Curriculum and its transaction

Many of the private preschools and those that were run by NGOs had ensured their quality it is therefore their conditions were found to be taking initiatives to keep the children engaged and think by using worksheets and teaching kits as compared to government-run preschools. Some of the schools were found to be adopting certain philosophy as a brand tag. Unlike the preschools, in AWCs more consideration was given to health and nutrition needs, implicitly the education component was ignored. The anganwadi worker being not being a professionally qualified teacher

did not give due focus on it. There were certain disappointing practices such as teaching of 3Rs which was being followed in some of preschools. Participation of little children in some of the preschools and most of AWCs was noticed to be passive. It is suggested that the activities conducted should involve swift involvement of the young children in the decision-making process. A preschool that values children's views, will enhance creative ideas.

Most of the preschool teachers (72%) were better qualified than AWWs. The irregular and insufficient salary was identified as the major factor that was responsible for demotivation of the preschool teachers with their jobs. In the case of the AWWs also the major demotivation was the low salary though they were being paid on time.

4.5. Way forward

ECCE has a major role to play in the all-round development of children. It cannot be narrowly understood. Both preschool and AWCs are playing a significant role in promoting ECCE among children in the age of three to six years. At the same time, there are differences between these two programmes in terms of provision of infrastructure, and provision of nutritional components. The nutritional component being there in AWC makes them attractive as there are free meals and snacks. While in the preschools the educational infrastructure is better as the teaching - learning materials are replenished and added on and also the teachers are qualified. The absence of these components often inhibits attainment of the desired objectives. So, the aspects in terms of human and physical infrastructure need to be given due weightage along with nutrition.

Some of the preschools were situated within the school complex, this kind of initiative needs to be encouraged because it facilitates better integration and transition. In such circumstances, the process of learning from transitioned children and older children can be encouraged. It is important that preschools and anganwadi centres should be linked to the primary schools, physically and programmatically. The school connectivity of preschool helps substantially in diverse ways with the direct supervision and sharing of resources,

facilities provided in the school system.

Although now there are certain norms with regard to preschool education its conditions, curriculum, pedagogy and teachers, it's essential that the sector may be regulated. The responsibility to educate children from three to six years must be shared as a major responsibility in the Ministry of Education and also all related departments like the

Department of Women and Child Development, the Department of Rural Development, Health and Education as well as Tribal Development. These Departments should address the issues pertaining to pre-school education on a common platform based on the need of the community and the children.

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