

Exploring Parental Perspectives On Early Childhood Education Schemes and Policy Relevance and Impact

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ABSTRACT

The period of early childhood education (ECE) is crucial in shaping a child's future, as it forms the basis for later academic performance and social skills. In recognition of this importance, various governments have launched numerous ECE programs and policies designed to enhance the learning experiences of young children. However, understanding the perspectives of parents on these programs and policies is vital to ensure their efficacy and relevance in practice. This study aims to explore parental perspectives on ECE schemes and policy relevance and impact in Tirupati municipality. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. A survey questionnaire was administered to 50 parents of children aged 3-6 years, enrolled in ECE programs. The data was collected by using simple random sampling technique. The study revealed that parents have a poor knowledge of ECE schemes and policies, recognizing their importance in supporting children's early learning and development. However, parents also identified several challenges. The study also highlighted the need for greater parental involvement in ECE policy development and implementation. This study provides valuable insights into parental perspectives on ECE schemes and policy relevance and impact. The findings have implications for policymakers, educators, and practitioners, highlighting the need for more effective collaboration and communication with parents to ensure that ECE schemes and policies meet the needs of young children and their families.

Keywords: ECE, ECCE, Awareness, Parents, Schemes.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is often considered a crucial component of universal education. As a result, nations have actively pursued it with great intensity. Following prolonged efforts, numerous nations are moving closer to achieving ECCE security (Chandra, et al. 2017). Since early childhood lays the groundwork for subsequent learning, it is a critical period for brain development. At

this point, children's early experiences influence their brain development and form synaptic connections that serve as the foundation for language, reasoning, problem-solving, social skills, behaviour, and emotional wellness (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005). As a result, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2013) predicted that "early years may be the optimum place to invest to improve learning results and sustain them in the long run." Achieving this aim can be facilitated by providing each child with exceptional Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). As per the Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All 2012, published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain and support development between birth and the age of eight." It encompasses intellectual stimulation, health care, physical, social, and emotional support, education, and nutrition. In addition, ECCE is seen to be crucial for achieving universal primary and secondary school enrolment, retention, and success. Rao (2010) also stated that "children in higher quality ECCE centres had superior perceptual, memory, verbal, and numerical skills than children in lower quality ECCE centres, demonstrating that quality is related to child outcome measures

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Priyanka Malik and Swarnaprava Behera, conducted a study on Early Childhood Care and Education policies, programmes and schemes in India. Their findings showed that there is a significant gap between policy and programme implementation and it is a cause for severe concern. They said it is not enough to simply provide services but need to provide Universal access, private sector control, and other claims necessitate efficient methods for service delivery and monitoring. Unless the quality elements of these programmes are ensured, they are unlikely to have an impact on children's situations.

A study conducted by the Chandra Reetu, Gulati Renu, Sharma Adarsh on the Quality Early Childhood Care and Education in India its Initiatives, Practice, Challenges and Enablers. Their results shows that there is lack of basic requisites for organising ECCE programs and activities like infrastructure; physical facility; health facilities; competent teachers; training and orientation of teacher; developmentally. Their interventions said that India must revise its target date according to the Incheon Declaration for achieving the goal of quality ECCE by 2030.

Venita Kaul, Depa Sankar, a study conducted on Early Childhood Care and Education in India. Findings of their study showed that research has indicated that the extent of ECCE impact is directly related to quality of provision. The current approach in the public sector has been more of a minimalist approach, which is not likely to pay dividends. It is important to at least ensure basic learning conditions for children, including availability of professionally trained teachers. In addition to ensuring basic infrastructure and provisions, two important aspects that have direct implications and needs to be addressed, are the ECCE curriculum and training.

A study conducted by Ms. Meera Jindal, Dr. Mukesh kanaskar on standalone preschools in Pune city from the perspective of management for the implementation of the early childhood care and education policy of India. Their research not only focuses on the most crucial age of 2 to 6 years of a child which is

considered to be the age of maximum potential of brain development but also comprises all the three stakeholders that is the parents of the child whose age is between 2 to 6 years, the preschool management and the government. Their results show that the parents are not very much aware about the ECCE policy and their norms so there is less questioning about the availability of services and quality by the parents to the preschool management.

Martinez-Beck, I., & Zaslow, M, conducted a study on Introduction: The Context for Critical Issues in Early Childhood Professional Development. Their study focus on all early care and education sectors, the chapter briefly summarizes recent findings on the numbers of young children participating in each of the types of early care and education and the extent of the public investment in each type. Then it turns to an overview of the facets of early childhood professional development examined in the different sections of this book, briefly previewing each chapter and the critical issues it raises.

OBJECTIVES

To analyze the awareness of parents towards the ECE programs, schemes, policies and initiatives.

To know the effective utilization level of schemes by the parents.

To identify the satisfaction level of parents regarding the ECE schemes provided by the Government .

To know whether they have the right knowledge of Government Schemes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Period of the study

The study has been conducted in December 2024.

Area of the study

The study is under taken in Tirupati Municipality choosing 5 areas, Tirupati District, Andhra Pradesh.

Sampling technique

The sample size of the study is 50 respondents. Simple random sampling technique is used to collect the data.

Data source

The data required for the study has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data have been collected through a structured questionnaire having questions on demographics and ECE schemes and initiatives that are implemented by the government. The questionnaire will have closed ended questions. Secondary data have been collected from various journals, existing articles and websites.

Statistical tools used for the study

Simple percentage analysis, Descriptive statistics.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The participants in this study primarily reside in the 3rd and 4th wards of Tirupati Municipality, specifically in Postal Colony, Lenin Nagar, Garudadri Nagar, Sripuram, and Vijay Krishna Nagar. The findings of the study are derived from the information supplied by these respondents. The sample

comprises 50 parents from these regions, which may not sufficiently reflect the overall population. This investigation is limited only on the awareness of schemes among parents.

IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT ECE SCHEMES TAKEN FOR STUDY

1. Government Schemes

1.1 Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, 1975

One of the world's largest programs for early childhood care and development comprising all children in the age group of 0-6 years.

It also caters to the needs of pregnant women and lactating mothers.

The scheme covers six services –

Supplementary nutrition

Pre-school non-formal education

Nutrition and health education

Immunization

Health check-up

Referral services.

1.2. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), 2018

Launched in 2018 for school education extending from pre-school to class 12.

Aim - to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from preschool to senior secondary stage.

Emphasises safe and secure infrastructure including sanitation facilities in preschools

Stresses on developmentally appropriate curriculum, learning activities, pedagogical practices and assessment.

Professional development of teachers

Community participation and engagement.

1.3. National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum Framework, 2013

A significant and comprehensive guiding document with aim to promote quality and excellence in early childhood care and education throughout the country.

Emphasizes children's holistic development and learning.

Aims at creating an enabling environment and providing need-based inputs as per children's developmental and contextual needs.

The Framework also acknowledges the importance of involvement of parents, family and community in ensuring quality ECCE

1.4. National Creche Scheme, 2017

The National Crèche Scheme is a centrally sponsored scheme being implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The scheme was earlier named as Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme. It aims to provide day care facilities to children (age group of 6 months to 6 years) of working mothers.

1.5. Anganwadi Services

Anganwadi Services are a crucial component of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program in India. Here are some key aspects of Anganwadi Services:

- **Supplementary Nutrition:** Nutritious food and snacks for children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers.
- **Immunization:** Vaccination services for children and pregnant women.
- **Health Check-ups:** Regular health check-ups for children and pregnant women.
- **Referral Services:** Referral to higher-level health facilities when needed.
- **Pre-School Education:** Pre-school education for children aged 3-6 years.
- **Nutrition and Health Education:** Education on nutrition, health, and child care practices.

1.6. Pre-Primary Classes in Government Schools

Government schools in India offer pre-primary classes. Pre-primary education in India is also known as Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). It's typically offered to children between the ages of 3 and 6. The curriculum focuses on developing basic skills like language, motor skills, socialization, and early literacy and numeracy.

Pre-primary education is offered in a variety of settings, including: government Anganwadi centres, pre-schools attached to government schools, private sector schools, and civil society organizations.

2. Non-Governmental Schemes

2.1. Akshara Foundation's Pre-School Program

Akshara Foundation's Pre-School Program is part of their Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiative, which was set up in 2003. The program aims to provide young children with a strong foundation in education, focusing on developmentally appropriate instruction to bolster their pre-reading and pre-math skills.

Key Features of the Program

School Readiness Programme (SRP): An 8-week program designed for Grade 1 students to prepare them for primary school.

- **English Learning Program:** Focuses on developing English language skills in children ⁴.
- **Partnerships with Government Schools:** Collaborates with government schools to implement their programs and reach a wider audience ^{5 4}.

2.2. Pratham's Early Childhood Education Program:

Pratham, one of the NGOs, serves as a professional ECCE organization, by providing elementary school preparatory education for 90,000 children across 12 states in India, while conducting ECCE research and surveys, and providing training for Anganwadi teachers. A program that provides ECE to children in rural and urban areas.

Pratham's Early Childhood Education Program focuses on the holistic development of children aged 3-8 years, with an emphasis on physical, language, cognitive, and social-emotional development. The program works with children, parents, and teachers to create a supportive learning environment.

2.3. Save the Children's Early Childhood Care and Education Program:

Save the Children's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program aims to provide young children with access to quality early childhood education, focusing on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. The program operates in various countries, including India.

2.4. Private pre-schools and play schools

Private pre-schools and play schools offer a range of benefits for young children, including structured learning environments that introduce basic academic concepts like letters and numbers ¹. These institutions also provide a safe and nurturing space for children to develop socially, emotionally, and cognitively.

INTERPRETATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: List of colonies

Colonies	No. of respondents	Percentage
Postal Colony	11	22%
Lenin Nagar	13	26%
Garudari Nagar	10	20%
Sripuram	10	20%
VijayKrishna Nagar	6	12%
Total	50	100%

Table 2: Demographic profile

Demographic profile of parents	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20 – 30	32	64%
	31 – 40	18	36%
	40 – 50	0	0
Gender	Male	6	12%
	Female	44	88%
Education	Illiterate	0	0
	Primary	0	0
	Secondary	12	24%
	UG	12	24%
	PG	26	42%
	PhD	0	0
Family size	1 – 4	34	68%
	5 and above	16	32%
Nature of family	Nuclear family	50	100%
	Joint family	0	0

Annual income	1-5 lakhs	36	72%
	Above 5 lakhs	14	28%
Children's Age	3-4	27	54%
	5-6	23	46%
Children's current grade level	Pre-K (3-4 years)	22	44%
	Kindergarten (5-6 years)	28	56%

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The age distribution indicates that 64% fall within the 20-30 age range, while 36% are aged 31-40. The gender composition reveals that 12% of the respondents are male and 88% are female. In terms of educational attainment, 12% have completed secondary education, another 12% hold undergraduate degrees, and 42% possess postgraduate qualifications. Family size distribution shows that 32% of respondents belong to families with 1-4 members, while all respondents (100%) are from families with more than four members. Furthermore, the data indicates that 100% of the respondents come from nuclear families, with no representation from joint families. Regarding annual income, 72% of respondents earn between 1 to 5 lakhs, and another 28% earn above 5 lakhs. The age distribution of children indicates that 54% are between 3 to 4 years old, while 46% are aged 5 to 6 years. Additionally, the current grade levels of the children show that 44% are in Pre-K, and 56% are in Kindergarten. The findings suggest that a significant majority of the parents are well-educated.

Table 3: Awareness about Government ECE Schemes

Particulars	Awareness wise respondents		Percentage
ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services)	Yes	32	64%
	No	18	36%
SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan)	0		0
National Creche Scheme (Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme)	0		0
National Early Childhood Care and Education (NECCE) Policy	0		0
Anganwadi Services	50		100%
Pre-Primary Classes in Government Schools	0		0

Table 3 illustrates the level of awareness regarding government schemes among the parent respondents in the sample. Among the selected parents, there is a notable lack of knowledge about government Early Childhood Education (ECE) schemes, with the exception of the Integrated Child Development Services

(ICDS) and Anganwadi services. Research indicates that all respondents are familiar with Anganwadi services, while 64% have knowledge of ICDS services.

Table 4: Awareness about Non-Governmental ECE Schemes

Particulars	Awareness wise respondents	Percentage
Akshara Foundation's Pre-School Program	0	0
Pratham's Early Childhood Education Program	0	0
Save the Children's Early Childhood Care and Education Program	0	0
UNICEF's Early Childhood Education Program	0	0
Private Pre-Schools and Play Schools	0	0

Table 4, Highlights the awareness about non-governmental schemes among sample respondent parents. Studies revealed that no one is aware of the non-governmental schemes. 100% respondent know about Anganwadi services and 64% are aware of ICDS services.

Table 5: Challenges faced in accessing ECE schemes

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of awareness	50	100%
Limited availability	0	0

Table 5 Highlights the challenges faced by the parents in accessing ECE schemes. Studies reveals that all parents have lack of awareness on the ECE schemes.

Table 6: Quality of ECE Services

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	0	0
Good	15	30%
Fair	17	34%
Poor	18	36%

Table 6 Highlights the rating given by parents in the quality of ECE services. Studies revealed that 30% rated for good, 34% rated for fair response and 36% rated for poor.

Table 7: Overall Satisfaction with the Schemes

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Very satisfied	0	0
Satisfied	39	78%
Neutral	11	22%
Dissatisfied	0	0
Very dissatisfied	0	0

Table 7 Highlights the overall satisfaction of the parents with the schemes. Studies revealed that 78% of parents are satisfied and 22% of parents either satisfied or dissatisfied.

Table 8: Impact of ECE policy

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Very positively	29	58%
Somewhat positively	21	42%
Neutral	0	0
Negatively	0	0
Very Negatively	0	0

Table 8 Highlights the impact of ECE policies on the quality of early childhood education. Studies revealed that 52% of parents said somewhat positive impact and 42% said either positive or negative impact and 6% said negative impact.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In the current study, a total of 11 programs, including Early Childhood Education (ECE) schemes and initiatives, have been examined. These programs are classified into government schemes, non-government schemes, and other initiatives. The questionnaire focuses on various aspects such as awareness and knowledge of ECE schemes, their utilization, the benefits and challenges associated with them, the quality of ECE services, health and nutrition, overall satisfaction, and the impact of ECE policies. Our findings reveal that parents possess limited knowledge regarding ECE schemes and initiatives. A significant number of parents are unaware of these schemes, initiatives, and policies. However, all mothers are familiar with Anganwadi services, and all have benefited from these services. In contrast, 64% of parents are aware of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), while 36% remain uninformed about it. The primary challenge faced by parents in accessing ECE schemes is a lack of awareness. Regarding the quality of ECE services, only 30% of respondents expressed a positive opinion, while the remainder reported being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. In terms of overall satisfaction with Anganwadi services, 78% of respondents indicated satisfaction, while the rest expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction. When assessing the impact of ECE policies on the quality of early education, the majority of respondents acknowledged a positive effect from the implementation of these policies. However, many parents reported that volunteers, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), and Anganwadi workers are not providing

adequate information about ECE schemes. Additionally, some respondents noted the absence of trained or experienced staff, which hinders their understanding of the various government-provided schemes. A small percentage of parents send their children to Balwadis, while the majority opt for private daycare centers. Due to inadequate infrastructure and facilities, along with a lack of trained staff, parents are reluctant to enroll their children in government daycare centers such as Balwadis.

CONCLUSION

The Indian government has introduced a variety of initiatives and policies aimed at guaranteeing that every child in the country receives high-quality early childhood care and education. These initiatives focus on enhancing the standards of care, education, nutrition, and health for young children during their critical developmental years. For a nation like India, which has a substantial child population, the primary challenge is to ensure that these children have access to quality education and sufficient opportunities to realize their potential and contribute to the nation's overall progress. While the country has established well-meaning early childhood care and education (ECCE) policies and programs, the considerable disparity between policy formulation and actual implementation raises significant concerns. The training provided to Anganwadi workers is insufficient for them to effectively deliver knowledge and skills to children consistently. Although this study is based on responses from 50 parents in the Tirupati municipality, the literature review suggests that these challenges are prevalent among both urban and rural parents. Consequently, the findings underscore the importance of effective collaboration and communication between policymakers, educators, and practitioners to ensure that early childhood education schemes and policies adequately address the needs of young children and their families.

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