

STATUS OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM OF ICDS SCHEME IN RURAL RAJASTHAN

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Abstract

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), which has been operating in the all districts of Rajasthan for decades. The present study was carried out to evaluate the pre-school education components of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in Rajasthan state of India. In order to achieve the stipulated objectives of the present study, four districts namely Sikar, Jaipur, Nagaur and Bikaner were selected from Rajasthan state of India. Further 05 Anganwadi centres from each selected district were selected based on random sampling. Thus, total 20 Anganwadi Centres were included in the study. From each Anganwadi centres, 03 children each between 3 to 6 years of age were selected randomly. So, total 60 beneficiary children were selected from all 20 Anganwadi centres. The results revealed that more than half 55.00% children did not give any response regarding rote counting. The majority (65%) of children were not able to count and tell the number of given stones. Only 8.33% children could identify 5-6 pictures of vegetables. A few 3.33% children could identify 3 or 4 of the colours by name. Majority (65.00%) children were not able to hold the crayon and were not able to colour inside the shape. The government should take necessary action to be given adequate training to Anganwadi Workers about pre-school education components of ICDS scheme in order to enable them to develop suitable skills for imparting pre-school education more effectively at AWCs.

Keywords: *Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), Pre-School Education (PSE).*

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Introduction

Children are the first agenda of human resource development not only because young children are the most vulnerable, but also because the foundation for lifelong learning and human development is laid in these crucial early years. It is now globally acknowledged that investment in human resources development is a pre-requisite for economic development of any nation. Early childhood (the first six years) constitutes the most crucial period in life, when the foundations are laid for cognitive, social, emotional, physical development and cumulative life-long learning.

Government of India proclaimed a National Policy on Children in August 1974 declaring children as, "supremely important asset". The policy provided the required framework for assigning priority to different needs of the child. The program of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was launched in 1975, seeking to provide an integrated package of services in a convergent manner for the holistic development of the country with 33 projects on an experimental basis, ICDS has expanded considerably in subsequent years and at present, there are 7075 sanctioned projects, 7075 operational projects in India and 304 sanctioned and 304 operational projects in Rajasthan (Annual Report 2018-19).

Kumar (2009) highlighted the fact that the number of operational projects had increased from 4608 in March 2002 to 5262 in March 2004, the number of children (3-6 years) attending pre-school education had increased from 166.56 lakh in March 2002 to 204.38 lakh in March 2004 during Tenth Five Years Plan. Gupta et al. (2013) in their article found that since its inception ICDS has expanded rapidly in its scope and coverage and total it covers approximately 36 million children less than six years of age at the end of 2012. It is perhaps the only country-wide program in the world functioning on a large scale, requiring multi sectoral operations and inter sectoral linkage for its implementation, Upto 31.03.2019, pre-school education service is being provided to about 30191978 lakh beneficiaries, comprising of about 15236017 lakh boy children and about 14955961 lakh girl children through a network of about 1372872 lakh operational Anganwadi Centre's (Annual Report 2018-19).

ICDS is a unique program, which encompasses the main component of human resource development especially education. Under ICDS, a package of services, including supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check up and referral services is provided to children below six years of age and expectant and nursing mothers. Non formal pre-school education is imparted to children in the age group of 3 to 6 years. Rattan (1997) gave details about genesis, growth, components of ICDS and described a package of seven services comprising supplementary nutrition, immunization, health checkups, referral services, treatment of illness, nutrition and health education and non- formal pre-school education which are provided under ICDS.

Pre-school education is very important activity of the ICDS Program. This focuses on the total development of the children from 3 to 6 years. Children 3-6 years have the benefit of non formal pre-school education through the institution of Anganwadi set up in each village. Non formal pre-school education is the most joyful play-way daily activity, visibly sustained for three hours a day. It does not impart formal learning but develops in the child desirable attitudes, values and behavior patterns and aim at providing environmental stimulation. Good pre-school education increases cognitive abilities, school achievements and improve class behavior among children. Arora et al. (2007) found significant difference in the cognitive abilities of ICDS and non ICDS children in their sample of Jammu and Kashmir. Cognitive abilities of ICDS children were found to be better than that of non ICDS children. Mathew (2001) found that the ICDS program succeeded in attaining the goals set for it. There was a significant difference in the intellectual abilities of the children who had received pre-school education, compared to those in non ICDS villages who did not have received pre-school education. Aggarwalet al. (2000) highlighted that the behaviour, general hygiene and academic performance of children who had availed Anganwadi services regularly were similar to those who had not availed these services with few differences in Raipur Rani ICDS Block of district Panchkula in Haryana. Rajni Dhingra, Iesha Sharma (2011) pointed out in Jammu district of Jammu and Kashmir that lack of adequate facilities in terms of space (both indoor and outdoor), quality of accommodation, drinking water and toilet facilities, furniture and teaching learning material are the main problems of ICDS scheme. Preschool education activities were

being planned and conducted by the AWWs on a routine basis but the activities were mostly repetitive and lacked novelty. Jain (2013) highlighted that the objectives of the ICDS mission would be institutionalize essential services and strengthen structure at all level. Government of India Released funds Under Integrated Child Development Services Scheme for the Year 2018-19 as on 31.03.2019 Rs. 1681171.24. In the background of these observations, it is very important to investigate the relevance and effectiveness of the world's largest and most unique ICDS program. So, this field study carried out in the Rajasthan state of India.

Objectives

The objective of present study is to evaluate the status of pre-school education program of ICDS Scheme in Rajasthan state of India. Beneficiary children of ICDS program from 3-6 years of age in Rajasthan state of India were the universe of the study. In this study Pre School education component of ICDS had been evaluated in the light of the objective to assess the performance of children in Pre-School Education activities at Anganwadi centers.

Methodology

In order to achieve the stipulated objectives of the present study, four districts namely Sikar, Jaipur, Nagaur and Bikaner were selected from Rajasthan state of India. Further 05 Anganwadi centres from each selected district were selected based on random sampling. Thus, there was total 20 Anganwadi Centres were included in the study. From each Anganwadi centre, 03 children each between 3 to 6 years of age were selected randomly. So, total 60 beneficiary children were selected from all 20 Anganwadi centres. The present study is primarily based on primary sources of information. For primary data, responses were elicited from the chosen sample through open and close ended questions in the Schedule followed by personal interviews. Schedules were designed in English and for the convenience of the respondents, they were translated in Hindi which is common language spoken in the Rajasthan. Observation method was also used during personal visits to AWCs. Besides this, secondary sources of information like books, articles, and newspaper clippings, articles in

research journals, websites and reports were also consulted to collect the factual data concerning the study. The data from the total sample of 60 children from 3-6 years of age was edited. The data collected was analyzed manually and tabulated.

Results and Discussion

Observation from the beneficiary children of the ICDS program brought important results and major ones are presented in the tabular form below. All tables are based on observation of the sample of 60 children during our field work. The performance of children at Anganwadi was assessed with regard to abilities of counting, to identify vegetables, to identify colours and colour inside shape with crayon etc.

Table 1: Pattern of children response regarding rote counting.

Attributes	Responses of Total Children
Count to 20	23(38.33%)
Count to 30	04(06.66%)
Count to 50	-----
No response	33(55.00%)
Total	60(100%)

Source: Culled from primary data.

The Table 1 provides vivid information about the abilities of rote counting of children at Anganwadi centers. It was disappointing to find in selected districts that no child was able to count up to 50 whereas as per expectation, these children should have learnt up to 50 by now. It was very unsatisfactory response of these Anganwadi children. It shows an inadequate performance. 38.33% of the children were able to count up to 20, while 06.66% of the beneficiaries' children were able to count up to 30. Further, it was seen that more than half 55.00% children did not give any response at all. This state of affairs was not encouraging.

Table 2: Stones counting ability of sample children

Attributes	Responses of Total Children
Count and tell the number	21(35.00%)
Cannot count and tell	15(25.00%)
No response	24(40.00%)
Any other	-----
Total	60 (100%)

Source: Culled from primary data

To examine the counting ability of the Anganwadi children under study, they were given some stones to count and tell the researcher. The data presented in the Table 2 shows that only 35% children of the selected sample were able to count and tell the number of stones, while 25% of beneficiaries' children could not count and tell the number of stones. 40% children did not give any response at all in this activity.

This performance is again below expectation. The majority (65%) of children were not able to count and tell the number of given stones. The main reasons of this unsatisfactory performance was that AWWs did not have suitable skills for their job responsibilities and they did not take interest and also they were not dedicated and sincere regarding PSE activities.

Table 3: Picture identification ability of sample children

Attributes	Responses of Total Children
Identified 1-2 pictures of vegetables.	19(31.66%)
Identified 3-4 pictures of vegetables.	14(23.33%)
Identified 5-6 pictures of vegetables.	05(08.33%)
No response of the respondent.	22(36.66%)
Total	60 (100%)

Source: Culled from primary data

It is interesting to see the Table 3 which shows responses regarding abilities of children at AWCs about the identification of pictures of vegetables by name. It saw from the data that 31.66% percent children could identify 1-2 pictures of vegetables, about 23.33% of the beneficiaries' children could identify 3-4 pictures of vegetables, while only 08.33% children could identify 5-6 pictures of vegetables.

It is disturbing to see that 36.66 percent of children did not give any response. It is also clear that majority (91.67%) children were not able to identify all six pictures of routinely used domestic vegetables. Thus unfortunately, the performance of the children was much below the expected level.

Table 4: Coloridentification ability of sample children

Attributes	Responses of Total Children
Knew 1 colour by name	22(36,66%)
Knew 2 colours by name	12(20.00%)
Knew 3 or 4 colours by name	02(03.33%)
No response.	24(40.00%)
Total	60 (100%)

Source: Culled from primary data.

To examine the understanding of the children about colours, they were shown a chart of four colours. As Table 4 describes, it was disappointing to found that only 3.33% children could identify three of the colours by name and no one could name all the four colours! About 36.66% children were able to identify one colour. While 20% could label two of the colours by names. It was abysmal that 40% children did not give any response as they did not know the name of any colour.

Thus, the performance of children was poor regarding identifying colours. This was extremely shocking to find that the high majority (96.67%) children were not able to identify three or four colours by name.

Table 5: Creative and artistic ability of sample children

Attributes	Responses of Total Children
The child made shape and colour the inside properly	21(35.00%)
The child did not make shape and colour the inside	13(21.66%)
No response.	26(43.33%)
Any other	-----
Total	60(100%)

Source: Culled from primary data

As Table 5 explains, it was found that about 35 percent children were able to hold the crayon and colour inside shape whereas it was deplorable that 21.66% children tried to catch the crayon but they were not able to hold the crayon and colour inside shape, while 43.33 percent children did not give any response regarding this activity.

It is also evident from the findings that majority (65.00%) children were not able to hold the crayon and also were not able to colour inside the shape. Thus, on this count, the responses showed poor performance of Anganwadi children.

Findings

Summing up the findings from the study of the children enrolled at Anganwadi Centre's of Rajasthan state of India shows that, the overall picture that emerges was dismal as almost all the things were below expectation level. Regarding the learning skills of the children and their preparation for the formal school, it was very disappointing that in all 20 Anganwadi Centres, no child was able to count up to 50. The majority (65%) of children were not able to count and tell the number of given stones. Only 8.33% children could identify 5-6 pictures of vegetables. A few 3.33% children could identify 3 or 4 of the colours by name. Unfortunately, a majority of children failed to hold the crayon and colour inside shape. It shows that preparation of the children in most impressionable age group for the formal school further is not up to the mark. In fact, it leaves much to be desired.

AWWs did not take any interest related to their job responsibilities due to lack of skills and lack of fixed services conditions, Supervisors were always busy in the paper work so they did not have any free time to guide and supervise the AWWs` pre-school activities. Based on the present experiences, the following are some of the steps that need to be taken for improve the pre-school education through ICDS:

- It is recommended that vigorous campaigns need to be launched by the Government using T.V., drama, folk songs, theater and other media to create awareness especially amongst the rural population about the long term benefit of the pre-school education programme of ICDS scheme.
- All the AWWs should be given adequate training and re-training at proper intervals of time about pre-school education components of ICDS scheme in order to enable them to develop suitable skills for imparting pre-school education more effectively at AWCs by involving children and cultivating their interest in learning.
- In addition, there should be proper comprehensive supervision of AWWs so that they dedicate sufficient time to pre-school educational activities which, in fact, lay a sound foundation of the children`s further education.

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