

A Study On Pre School Education Program For Children Under ICDS In Rural Punjab

Sarbjit Singh Kular

V.P.O Nangal, Tehsil Barnala, Barnala, Punjab 148109 India

Abstract:

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), which has been operating in the all districts of Punjab for decades. The present study was carried out to evaluate the pre-school education components of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in Barnala district of Punjab. In order to achieve the objectives of the present study, two ICDS projects of Barnala district of Punjab, namely Barnala ICDS project and Sehna ICDS project were selected for the study. Further 10 Anganwadi Centres from Barnala ICDS project and 10 Anganwadi Centres from Sehna ICDS project were selected on the basis of random sampling. Total 20 Anganwadi Workers were also selected from all 20 AWCs for studies. Further, six children from three to six years of age were selected randomly from each Anganwadi Centre. So, total 120 children were selected from all these 20 Anganwadi centres. The results revealed that only 43.70 percent of the total beneficiary children were enrolled in register of AWWs for pre-school education. Only 6.66% children could identify 5-6 pictures of vegetables. A few 2.50% children could identify 3 or 4 of the colours by name. 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).*

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 life long 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 nation¹. 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 7074 sanctioned projects, 6463 operational projects in India².

Kumar (2009)³ highlighted the fact that the number of operational project 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)⁴ 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 31.01.2013, pre-school education service is being provided to about 34665683 lakh beneficiaries, comprising of about 17673362 lakh boy children and about 16992321 lakh girl children through a network of about 1331076 lakh operational *Anganwadi* Centres⁵.

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)⁶ 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)⁷ 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)⁸ 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. Aggarwal *et al.* (2000)⁹ 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. Jain (2013)¹⁰ highlighted that the objectives of the ICDS mission would be institutionalize essential services and strengthen structure at all level. There is a plan to roll out strengthened and re structured ICDS in three years beginning with 200 High Burden districts in the first year 2012-13 and so on. 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 programme. So, this field study carried out in the Barnala district of Punjab.

Scope and Objectives

The scope of present study is to evaluate the impact of pre-school education program of ICDS Scheme on children from 3-6 years of age in two ICDS Project namely Barnala and Sehna of Barnala district of Punjab. In this study Pre School education component of ICDS had been evaluated in the light of the objectives, to collect the actual data of Pre-School Education beneficiaries at *Anganwadi* centers and to assess the performance of children in Pre-School Education activities at *Anganwadi* centers.

Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives, ICDS beneficiary children between 3 to 6 years of Barnala District of the state of Punjab form the universe of the study. Two ICDS projects of Barnala District namely, Barnala ICDS project and Sehna ICDS project were selected for the study. Further 10 *Anganwadicentres* from each ICDS project were selected on the basis of random sampling. From each *Anganwadi*, 06 children each between 3 to 6 years of age were selected randomly. So, total 120 beneficiary children were selected from all 20 *Anganwadicentres*. Total 20 *Anganwadi* workers (one from each *Anganwadi* Centre) were also selected for study. 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 Punjabi which is common language spoken in the Barnala district.

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 120 children from 3-6 years of age and 20 *Anganwadi* workers was edited. The data collected was analyzed manually and tabulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal interviews and observation brought important results and major ones are presented in the tabular form below. First two tables are related to responses of *Anganwadi* workers and the rest are based on observation of the sample of 120 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: Pre-School education beneficiaries children from 1 Jan., 2011 to 31 Dec, 2011.

(Number)

Particulars	Barnala	Sehna	Overall
Eligible Children	378	384	762(100.00)
Beneficiaries enrolled	170	163	333(43.70)
PSE not attended	16	47	63(18.91)
Attended 1-14 days	15	08	23(6.90)
Attended 15-24 days	18	07	25(7.50)
Attended 25 days & above	121	101	222(66.66)

Source: Culled from secondary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

The Table 1 reveals that there were total average 762 eligible children for pre-school education from 1 Jan., 2011 to 31 Dec., 2011 at all 20 AWCs. It was shocking to found that only 333 (43.70%) beneficiary children were enrolled in

register of AWWs for pre-school education. Out of them, 63(18.91%) children did not attend any pre-school education activity. 23 (6.90%) beneficiary children used 1 to 4 days for attended pre-school education activities. 25 (7.50%) children came 15-

24 days at AWCs for attended pre-school education activities while 222(66.66%) children used 25 days and above to attended preschool education activities at AWCs.

It can be concluded that the coverage of beneficiary children for pre-school education activities under the ICDS scheme is not satisfactory.

Table 2: Reason for not attending Pre-School education activities by beneficiaries children. (Percent)

Reasons	Barnala (n ₁ =10)	Sehna (n ₂ =10)	Overall (n=20)
Anganwadi centres far off.	10.00	10.00	10.00
Parent do not understand significance of Pre-School Education	10.00	----	05.00
Lack of facilities of water, space, light etc. at Anganwadi centres	10.00	-----	05.00
The primary and private school teachers admit the children up to 4 years of age at their schools	70.00	90.00	80.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Culled from primary data.

Replying to the question about the main reason for less than 50% beneficiaries attending pre-school education activities atAWCs, as the Table 2 describes, it was found that a majority (80.00%) of the AWWs revealed that the primary and private school teachers admitted the children up to 4 years of age at their schools when they were short of the number of kids in their schools in order to justify their existence. Only 10% AWWs viewed that AWCs were far off from the residence of beneficiaries, merely one (05%) AWW felt that

parents did not understand the significance of pre-school education. The remaining one 05% AWW blamed the lack of facilities of water, space, light etc. at AWCs as the main reason.

It was ironically that the children of a certain age group meant to be attending pre-school in AWCs were unable to attend pre-school education at AWCs.

Now, the discussion turns to the children who were the beneficiaries for pre-school education programme

Table 3: Pattern of children response regarding counting (Percent)

Reasons	Barnala (n ₁ =10)	Sehna (n ₂ =10)	Overall (n=20)
Up to 20	41.66	46.66	44.16
Up to 50	23.33	11.66	17.50
Up to 100	-----	-----	-----
No response	35.00	41.66	38.33
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Culled from primary data.

Now coming to the children in the sample, the Table 3 provides vivid information about the abilities of rote counting of children at *Anganwadi* centers. It was disappointing to find that put together all the two ICDS Projects of Barnala district, no child was able to count up to 100 whereas as per expectation, these children should have learnt up to 100 by now. It was very

unsatisfactory response of these *Anganwadi* children. It shows an inadequate performance. 44.16% of the children were able to count up to 20, while 17.50% of the beneficiaries' children were able to count up to 50. Further, it was seen that 38.33% children did not give any response at all. This state of affairs was not encouraging.

Table 4: Counting ability of sample children (Percent)

Reasons	Barnala (n ₁ =10)	Sehna (n ₂ =10)	Overall (n=20)
Count and tell the number	35.00	33.33	34.16
Cannot count and tell	43.33	40.00	41.66
No response	21.66	26.66	24.16
Any other	-----	-----	-----
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

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 4 shows that only 34.16% children of the selected sample were able to count and tell the number of stones, while 41.66% of

beneficiaries' children could not count and tell the number of stones. 24.16% children did not give any response at all in this activity.

This performance is again below expectation. The majority (65.82%) 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 5: Pictureidentification ability of sample children (Percent)

Reasons	Barnala (n ₁ =10)	Sehna (n ₂ =10)	Overall (n=20)
Identified 1-2 pictures of vegetables.	45.00	35.00	40.00
Identified 3-4 pictures of vegetables.	21.66	25.00	23.33
Identified 5-6 pictures of vegetables.	05.00	08.33	06.66
No response of the respondent.	28.33	31.66	30.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Culled from primary data. .

It is interesting to see the Table 5 which shows responses regarding abilities of children at AWCs about the identification of pictures of vegetables by name. It saw from the data that 40 percent children could identify 1-2 pictures ofvegetables, about 23.33% of the beneficiaries' children could identify 3-4 pictures ofvegetables, while only 6.66% children could identify 5-6 pictures of

vegetables.

It is disturbing to see that 30 percent of children did not give any response. It is also clear that majority (93.33%) 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 6: Coloridentification ability of sample children (Percent)

Reasons	Barnala (n ₁ =10)	Sehna (n ₂ =10)	Overall (n=20)
Knew 1 colour by name	43.33	36.66	40.00
Knew 2 colours by name	13.33	13.33	13.33
Knew 3 or 4 colours by name	05.00	-----	02.50
No response.	38.33	50.00	44.16
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Culled from primary data.

To examine the understanding of the

children about colours, they were shown a chart of

four colours. As Table 6 describes, it was disappointing to found that only 2.50% children could identify three of the colours by name and no one could name all the four colours! About 40.00% children were able to identify one colour. While 13.33% could label two of the colours by names. It was abysmal that 44.16% 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 (97.50%) children were not able to identify three or four colours by name.

Table 7: Creative and artistic ability of sample children (Percent)

Reasons	Barnala (n ₁ =10)	Sehna (n ₂ =10)	Overall (n=20)
The child made shape and colour the inside properly	35.00	25.00	30.00
The child did not make shape and colour the inside	45.00	46.66	45.83
No response.	20.00	28.33	24.16
Any other	-----	-----	-----
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Culled from primary data.

As Table 7 explains, it was found that about 30 percent children were able to hold the crayon and colour inside shape whereas it was deplorable that nearly half (45.83%) children tried to catch the crayon but they were not able to hold the crayon and colour inside shape, while 24.16 percent children did not give any response regarding this activity.

It is also evident from the findings that majority (70.00%) 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.

CONCLUSIONS

Summing up the findings from the study of *Anganwadi* workers and the children enrolled in their *Anganwadis* of Barnala ICDS project of Punjab shows that, the overall picture that emerges was dismal as almost all the things were below expectation level. Only 43.70 percent of the total

beneficiary children were enrolled in register of AWWs for pre-school education. It was serious that all enrolled children were not coming regularly for attending pre-school activities at AWCs. 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 100. The majority of children were not able to count and tell the number of given stones. Only 6.66% children could identify 5-6 pictures of vegetables. A few 2.50% 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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⁵Annual Report 2012-2013, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, New Delhi, p. 223.

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⁷Arora.S, Bharti S. and Sharma S. (2007), Comparative Study of Cognitive Development of ICDS and Non-ICDS Children (3-6 years) in Jammu andKashmir.Journal of Human Ecology, 22 (3):201-204.

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