

Quality of Early Childhood Services: Bihar

Swati Bawa Sawhney

Bharati College, Delhi University

Abstract: *This study aims to demonstrate a model of seamless transition for the child from home to preschool and from preschool to schools, for children from marginalized communities in the State of Bihar. The study was carried out in two ICDS blocks, Kalyanpur and Khanpur of Samastipur district. The sample includes 70 AWCs, 350 children studying at AWC, 63 Focus group discussions with caregivers. The paper presents the main findings of the status of children 3 - 6 years as well as the quality of services accessible to them and also perceptions of the caregivers.*

Keywords: Marginalized, Education, Anganwadi, Integrated Child Development Services

1. Introduction

This study was located in the state of Bihar, India. Bihar being the third largest state in India has 10.41 crores (2011 Census) of population below the poverty line, which deprives children of an enabling environment for development and growth and prevents them from reaching their full potential in life. The female literacy in Bihar is as low as 51.50% (NFHS-4)

In Bihar, the state of girl's education falls below that of average of boys. Gender Parity Index (GPI), which is ratio of number of girls' enrolment to the number of boys' enrolment, was 0.85 for secondary education in 2007-08 [2]. The elementary education in Bihar is still below the national average and this demands immediate attention. While the sex ratio at the national level was 940 in 2011, the sex ratio of Bihar was 916 according to Census, 2011. In addition, Population (female) age 6 years and above who ever attended school (%) is 67.9 in Bihar (NFHS - 4). The children from marginalized communities are the worst off.

The nutritional levels of children as reported by NFHS-4 report (2015 -16) indicate 56% of the children under age 5. In addition to this, there are various flood prone areas which make children even more vulnerable to risk.

1.1 Significance of ECCE

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) makes a positive contribution to children's long term development and learning by facilitating an enabling and stimulating environment in these foundation stages of lifelong learning [4]. In reality, children from the deprived communities lack such exposure and stimulation since their home situation is not conducive and they also have no access to pre-school education; Therefore they find it extremely difficult to adjust and learn in the new environments like the formal school which, given this situation could be an extremely alienating and traumatic experience for the child. So, a seamless transition from home to preschool and from preschool to schools, for children from marginalized communities is essential.

The early learning component of the Govt. of India's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is expected to be a significant input for providing children below 6 years

a sound foundation for cumulative lifelong learning and development. It is also expected to contribute to the universalization of primary education, by providing to the child the necessary preparation for primary schooling and offering substitute care to younger siblings, thus freeing the older ones – especially girls – to attend school. In addition, ECCE is seen as an instrument in poverty eradication as it has the potential to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and deprivation and can therefore be a critical input for sustainable development.

1.2 Situation Analysis

The vision of the study was to ensure the marginalized, especially lower caste children in the age group of birth to 8 years, have a smooth transition from home to formal schools in the selected locations of Bihar state. The study thus intended to bring the three significant sites in the early childhood continuum – home, preschool and primary school together and complementarily as three environments that are child centered/ child friendly and geared towards promoting early learning. This paper is based on the situation analysis of children in the age group of 3 – 6 years children, which was carried out with the objective of identifying the main gaps and recommendations for interventions. It assessed the quality of ECE available to them through the Anganwadi programme, the kind of home support they get and their levels of preparedness for school.

2. Review of Literature

Martin et.al. (2009) The paper explores diverse pathways through early childhood in the context of Andhra Pradesh state, India. The particular focus is on experiences of pre-school and transitions to primary school. The study start with the premise that children's earliest educational experiences can have a crucial influence on their lifelong adjustments and achievements. The study reveals quite positive, suggesting equitable access to early childhood provision as well as high levels of primary school attendance.

Nagaraja G et.al. (2014) The study aimed to find out the perception of parents and their expectations regarding the functioning of anganwadi center. Parents noticed that health habits of children were improved and there was overall improvement in the preschool activities, like outdoor

activities, learning alphabets, singing, rhymes etc. Though they also felt Anganwadi workers were spending most of the time in preparing supplementary nutrition and maintaining records and therefore it was difficult to concentration on pre-school educational activities.

Rehman H et.al. (2017) The study was carried out to assess the level of utilization of services from Anganwadi centres among children aged 3-6 years in the rural areas of Lucknow. The study found utilization of Anganwadi services to be quite low. As compared to Pre School Education more of the Parents perceived Supplementary Nutrition to be beneficial. However most of them were not satisfied and on a whole perceived the services to be of poor quality. Therefore Stringent supervision to ensure provision and quality of service of the ICDS centres must be done. Moreover the functions of AWWs should not be restricted to distribution of supplementary nutrition only, but a need based approach should be developed to improve the satisfaction level of the end users.

Samanta S et.al. (2017) The study aimed to assess ECE component of ICDS services through measurement of school readiness and other correlates. The study concludes that for the preparation of formal schooling of children most important needs of the hour are physical facility of AWCs, supportive supervision of AWWs, and creation of congenial environment at home.

3. Method/Approach

3.1 Sample Selection

A total of 70 AWCs in the two blocks namely Kalyanpur and Khanpur of Samastipur district of Bihar were selected as the sample for the study, with equal proportion from both the blocks. The criterion for selection of AWCs was mainly done on the basis of panchayats and geographical location. It was kept in mind that the centres taken for the study should not be very widely dispersed in terms of geographical area. From each AW, 5 children in the 3 to 6 age group were selected for assessment on school readiness skills. In addition, their mothers were called for focused group discussion to assess their perceptions and knowledge about early childhood education and child rearing and the AW programme. Each AW programme was also observed for the full daily duration to assess quality of the ECE being transacted.

The sample thus includes 70 AWCs; 350 Children (5 year olds) attending AWC covering 5 children from each centre and in addition, 630 mothers/caregivers with children in the age group of 3 - 6 years including both the blocks i.e. Kalyanpur and Khanpur.

3.2 Tools used for the survey

Rating scale: The data was collected to assess the quality of the programme in terms of programme schedule and language experiences components at AWC. The data was collected for both the aspects on a scale of 0, 1 and 2 to move in a range from negative to positive. Then weighted

average mean was calculated. The data was collected for 70 AWCs.

School readiness instrument (SRI): Secondly, SRI was administered which consist of ten items including six domains: Pre number concept, Sequential Thinking, Classification concept, Number readiness concept, Language skills, and Reading readiness skill. But later these ten items were combined and further divided into three categories of competencies i.e. Pre mathematical concepts, Number concept, Language skills & reading readiness. The SRI was administered on 350 children studying at the AWC in the age group of 4 – 5 years i.e. taking 5 children from each AWC and in a way covering 70 AWCs in order to map their readiness towards school.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) questionnaire: The FGD questionnaire was administered for caregivers / mothers with children in the age group of 3-6 years to know about their child rearing practices with respect to the age of their children. The FGD questions were framed with certain pointers in mind to maintain the flow of the discussion. The FGD included 10 caregivers at each centre. Content analyses of all the responses from all FGDs were done and thematic categories were identified. Each category was further subdivided into three parts, positive response, and negative response and not mentioned. Each FGD output was analyzed and given a score of 0/1 for each of the three sub categories depending on the occurrence and the nature of the response. Thus, for each FGD there could be multiple responses since the group members could give different responses. The frequencies for each category of response were converted into percentages using the total no. of responses as the denominator. The results obtained were interpreted in terms of levels of awareness and feedback on practices.

4. Result / Discussion

The result from the study have been divided into three sections. The 1st section covers the perception of parents regarding ECE services offered to them. 2nd section discusses about the quality of ECE services as observed by the researcher and 3rd section talks about child outcomes as a result of ECE services.

4.1 Parent's perceptions

There are certain questions which the study has raised:

- 1) What do parents believe about ECE?
- 2) Is ECE conducive for a child's learning?
- 3) What is the kind of home support available?

Table 1: Parent's perceptions

Aspects	Percentages (n=63)	Types of responses
Is child sent to AWC	80.8%	Sent to AWC
	19%	Not sent to AWC
Awareness level regarding AWC services	18.5%	Positive description given by caregivers
	76.3%	Sent for food and immunization
	5%	Unaware/ No response given
Kind of learning at AWC	39%	Positive description: AW learning given
	50.4%	No learning takes place

	10.4%	Unaware/ No response given
AWC activities described by caregiver	10.4%	Caregivers have seen AWW doing some activities
	55.5%	Only food distribution, no activity
	33.9%	Unaware/ No response given

The above table 1 states the responses of caregivers with 3-6 year old children taken through focus group discussions. The positive finding is that, around 80 percent of caregivers considers Early Childhood Education as an important component for their child's life and therefore send them regularly to the AWC as reported by 63 FGDs. It is a matter of great concern that even after repeated efforts the AWC still remains a place merely for food and immunization as reported by 76% of the caregivers. Only 1/5th of the caregivers shared their awareness and gave a positive description of the services provided by the AWC such as educating pregnant mothers, making children play and learns rhymes. Around 40% of the caregivers considered AWC as a place where children learns to sit and is taught counting while rest felt it was a place where no learning takes place and is only meant for food. In addition, few of them were even found to be unaware of the services provided by the AWC.

Only 1/10th caregivers reported to have seen AWW doing some useful activities like storytelling, counting etc. whereas above 30% were unaware of the activities performed with children.

4.2 Content of ECE Programme / Quality of ECE

The below table 2 gives the content of an ECCE programme as observed through Early childhood environment rating scale (ECERS) by reviewing 70 AWCs in two blocks of Bihar. The quality of ECCE programme is completely deficit. The quality of classroom environment also needs to be addressed as a part of intervention.

Table 2(a): Content of an ECE Programme

Aspects	Weighted Average Rating Score	In case rating is around 0	In case rating is around 1	In case rating is around 2
Listening opportunities	0.3	No opportunity to listen to language through planned activity	Have opportunity to listen to language through at least 1 planned activity	Have opportunity to listen to language through > 1 planned activity
Expressive Language – Speaking opportunities	0.6	Few or no opportunity to speak in AW	Has opportunity to speak in AW but through single word or short sentence	Encouraged to speak in AW on their own & share queries, ideas etc.

Language Development – As per table 2, Children attending the AWC are not provided any opportunities of improving their language through listening nor given chances to express their verbal abilities. There is no healthy interaction between the AWW and children which could lead to improved language development of preschool children.

Table 2(b): Content of an ECE Programme

Aspects	Weighted Average Rating Score	In case rating is around 0	In case rating is around 1	In case rating is around 2
Activities materials for developing cognitive skills	0.1	No activities & material for seriation, classification, reasoning pattern making, sequencing etc.	Activities and material used only to demonstrate or used by few children	Activities and material used to demonstrate and used by all children

As per the above table, in addition, the data also reveals that no activities or materials are organized at the AWC to develop child's ability to seriate, classify, give reason and make patterns in order to improve their **cognitive abilities**.

Table 2(c): Content of an ECCE programme

Aspects	Weighted Average Rating Score	In case rating is around 0	In case rating is around 1	In case rating is around 2
Activities for reading, writing and number readiness	0.1	No readiness activities such as phonetics, sound visual association, odd man out, pre number concept, picture book reading etc.	Few 4 + yrs. children involved in readiness activities	All 4 + yrs. Children involved in readiness activities
Activities for Reading, Writing and Number	0.3	Teaching of formal reading, writing and number work	Teaching of formal reading, writing and number work with help of activities	No formal reading, writing and number work only activities conducted
Quality of teacher child interaction	0.5	Controls in an authoritarian way	Indifferent to children, not involved with them more than required	Converses pleasantly and meaningfully with children
# Children mostly talk amongst themselves - no guided conversation				

On the other hand, no efforts are being done to build children's readiness towards formal school. The 4+ children are not made to involve in activities such as phonetics, sound visual association, odd one out, pre number concept, picture book reading etc. which can improve their readiness towards school. More of formal reading, writing and numbers are taught at the AWC in an authoritarian way without active participation of children. In a nutshell, no activities are being performed for the all-round development of children attending the AWC.

4.3 Child outcomes on School Readiness Instrument

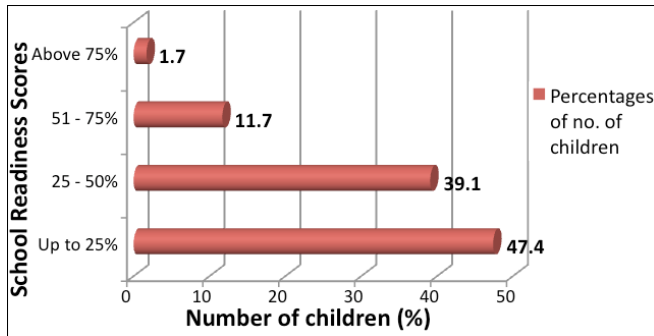


Figure 1: School Readiness Scores of children

The school readiness instrument includes three categories of competencies - Pre mathematical concepts, Number concept, Language skills & reading readiness. The table reveals that 86.5% of children attending the AWCs could score less than 50% marks out of total score of 40 in the school readiness instrument.

For all the aspects of school readiness instrument, the performance of children is really poor. It shows that children's studying at the AWC has gained partial clarity for all the concepts. Therefore, this component needs to be strengthened at the level of ECCE programme. It also proves the above findings that not much effort is being done at the AWC to prepare children for school. The graphs below show the breakup of school readiness scores in terms of 3 categories of competencies i.e. Pre mathematical concepts, Number concept and Language skill & reading readiness.

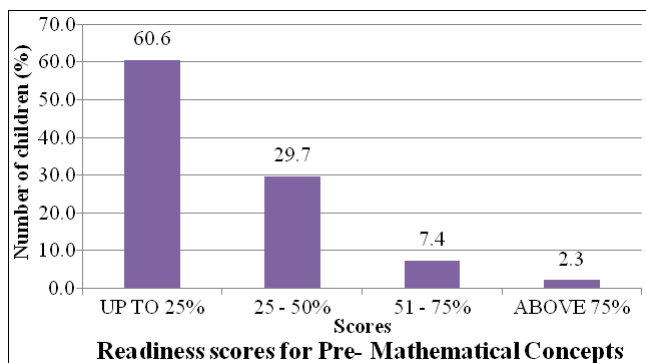


Figure 2 (a): Scores for pre-mathematical concepts

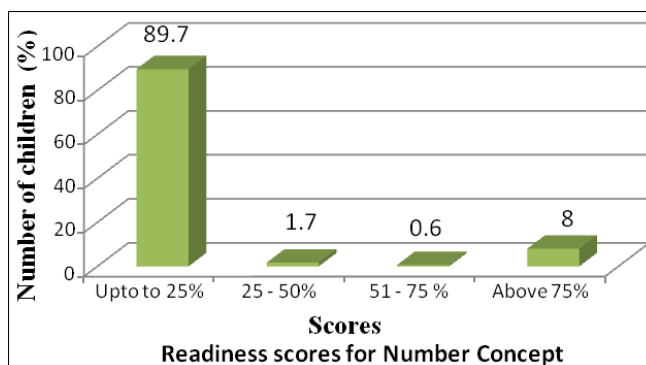


Figure 2 (b): Scores for number concept

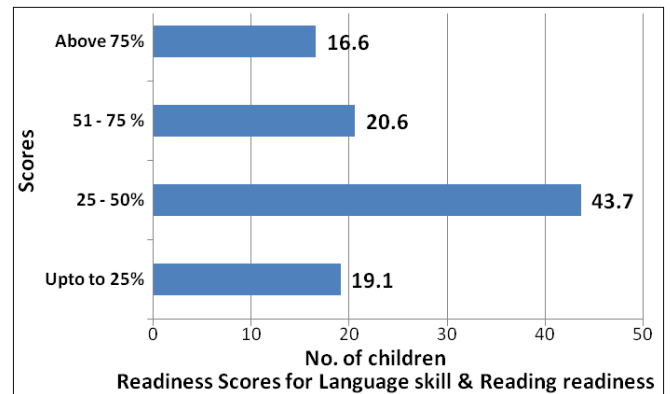


Figure 2(c): Scores for Language skill & Reading readiness

Though most of the parents are sending their children to the AWC but the children are not made to perform any activities for their development and similarly no efforts are being done to prepare them for school which is the prime objective of an ECCE programme. The aim of pre school education is to create such learning environment for children that would promote social, cognitive, physical and aesthetic development of 3 – 6 years old through the medium of play. But unfortunately, no such opportunities are provided to children, attending the AWC at Bihar which make them more prone to risk other than being marginalised. This can further lead to dropping out at the primary levels.

5. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, the study reports the following recommendations:

5.1 Need to improve the classroom processes

In terms of classroom processes, no activities are organized for the promotion of child's development and more of authoritarian method of interaction is followed. For this, training of the 'sevika' as well as 'sahayka' along with regular and supportive monitoring and supervision is very important. The training should focus on planning and organization of a play based program which is age appropriate and caters to all round development of the children. It should focus on school readiness for children between 4 – 6 years which was found in the study to be almost absent. Emphasis on processes for socialization should also be laid as a part of the training. These aspects would not only provide a sound foundation for children's development but also prepare them better for school and thus facilitate the transition from preschool to primary school.

5.2 Smooth transition of children

To provide a smooth transition of children studying at the AWC for entry into school, meetings among AWW should be organized and children can also be given opportunities to visit the school to familiarize them. Secondly, school teacher of class I & II should be invited at the AWC, to introduce the school activities to children.

5.3 Awareness building and involvement of caregivers

An important component of the preschool program of the AWC should be regular meeting with parents and their involvement in the activities of the AWC. The meetings and home visits should focus on educating the parents on the importance of play and its importance for language and cognitive development of the child, the socio emotional needs of the child and the kinds of interaction and environment parents should ensure at home to meet these needs. The emphasis should be on continuity of approach between parent's child rearing and the preschool environment.

Therefore, Children living in poverty are at an educational disadvantage relative to children from more comfortable backgrounds. As a result, there is a cycle of poverty by which the children of poor parents are destined to remain poor and marginalized in the future unless specific programmes aimed at changing the situation are implemented [9]. So, early childhood education can act as a mechanism for children to compensate the poverty conditions.

6. Future Scope

The study is limited due to its time period in terms of its sample as it covers only 2 blocks in one district of a State. Similar study can be carried out in other States wherever ICDS services are being provided. The study can even extend its scope to cover content of an ECE program with regard to other domains such as physical development, socio-emotional development, aesthetic development and creativity.

References

- [1] <https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/bihar.html>
- [2] http://www.in.undp.org/content/dam/india/docs/india_factsheet_gender_n_social_exclusion_indicators.pdf
- [3] http://rchiips.org/NFHS/FCTS/BR/BR_FactSheet_230_Patna.pdf
- [4] National Early childhood care and education (ECCE) curriculum framework (2013) https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/national_ecce_curr_framework_final_03022014%20%282%29.pdf
- [5] Martin (2009). Early Childhood Education Trajectories and Transitions: A study of the experiences and perspectives of parents and children in Andhra Pradesh, India. Young Lives Working Paper 52. Young Lives, University of Oxford, Department of International Development. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/19306/>
- [6] Nagraja et.al (2014), Building Social Relationships and Health Habits at Anganwadi center: A Sociological Study of Anganwadi Children and I.C.D.S. Programme, Kolar District, Karnataka State, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention ISSN (Online): 2319 – 7722, ISSN (Print): 2319 – 7714 www.ijhssi.org Volume 3 Issue 5 | May. 2014| PP.32-36
- [7] Rehman H et al. (2017) Utilization and Parental Perception towards Anganwadi Services in Rural Lucknow- A Cross Sectional Study, International

Journal of Health Sciences & Research (www.ijhsr.org)
23 Vol.7; Issue: 7; July 2017
https://www.ijhsr.org/IJHSR_Vol.7_Issue.7_July2017/3.pdf

- [8] Samanta S et.al. (2017) Status of early childhood education under integrated child development services scheme in bankura municipality, West Bengal. Indian J Public Health [serial online] 2017 [cited 2020 Apr 11]; 61:261-6. Available from: <http://www.ijph.in/text.asp?2017/61/4/261/220065>
- [9] Van den Bosch, K., Callan, T., Estivill, J. et al. A comparison of poverty in seven European countries and regions using subjective and relative measures. J Popul Econ 6, 235–259 (1993). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00163069>

Author Profile



Swati Bawa Sawhney is currently Assistant Professor at Bharati College, University of Delhi. Prior to this she worked as an Early Childhood Consultant at the Ministry of Women and Child development under the Strategic Health and Nutrition Partnership Programme by DFID to provide support to MWCD, GoI through Deloitte led Technical Support Agency. Prior to working with the WCD Ministry, she was a Senior Consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and worked on multiple projects with GOI and UN. She has also worked at Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education (CECED), Ambedkar University as Research Associate. Her major area of work has been monitoring the status and implementation of National ECCE Policy across States/UTs, guidelines for Integrating Children with Special Needs, Services for caregivers with children in the age group of 0-3 years on early stimulation and tracking of developmental delay. She also contributed to policy briefs titled 'Unpacking Care – Protecting Early childhood' and 'Brain development in early years' and research projects - 'Preparing teachers for Early Childhood Care and Education', Case study of Uttarakhand Sevanidhi – 'The Balwadi Programme' and Link for learning – Action research in Bihar.