

Impact of Pre School Education Program of Icds on Children in Rural Punjab

Sarbjit Singh

Assistant Professor in Public Administration at Guru Gobind Singh College Sanghera (Barnala)

ABSTRACT : *Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme is one of the flagship programmes of the Government of India and represents one of the world's largest and unique programmes for early childhood care and development. The present study was carried out to evaluate the pre-school education component of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in Barnala district of Punjab. In order to achieve the objective of the present study, all three ICDS projects of Barnala district of Punjab, namely Barnala ICDS project, Sehna ICDS project and Mehal Kalan ICDS project were selected for the study. Further 10 Anganwadi Centres from Barnala ICDS project, 10 Anganwadi Centres from Sehna ICDS project and 10 Anganwadi Centres from MehalKalan ICDS project were selected on the basis of random sampling. Total 30 Anganwadi Workers were also selected from all selected 30 AWCs for studies. Further, six children from three to six years of age were selected randomly from each Anganwadi Centre. So, total 180 children were selected from all these 30 Anganwadi centres. The results revealed that only 45.42% of the total beneficiary children were enrolled in register of AWWs for pre-school education. A few 03.33% children could identify 3 or 4 of the colours by name. Only 8.33% children could identify 5-6 pictures of vegetables. Unfortunately, a majority of children failed to hold the crayon and colour inside 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), Below Poverty Line (BPL).*

I. INTRODUCTION

Early years shape children's future success at school, in their lives and nation's life at large. "The building up of nation depends on building men and women and the process of building men and women depends very considerably on what is done to children. It is, therefore, of high importance that we pay attention to the well-being and growth of children." So said India's first Prime Minister, late Sri Jawaharlal Nehru. In the inaugural address to the SAARC conference on South Asian Children in October 1986 in New Delhi, our ex-Prime Minister Mr.P.V. NarashimhaRao said,..."Our development is primary linked with the human factor, namely, the quality of coming generation which is determined by the state of well-being of children today and their preparation for life."¹ It proclaims unmistakably that children hold the key to the nation's future. 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 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 7074 sanctioned projects, 6463 operational projects in India.² Vijay Kumar³ (2009) 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 Xth Five Years Plan. V. Mohan Rao⁴ in his article (2010) found that the Government of India has given very high priority to the ICDS and significant achievements have been registered in this area e.g., the numbers of children (3-6) years attended *Anganwadi* centres for pre-school education have increase of 60 percent during the period from March 2004 to January 2008.

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, under the scheme, 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* Centres.⁵

ICDS is a unique program, which encompasses the main components of human resource development namely- health, nutrition and 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 and, health and nutrition education to women between 15 to 45 years and adolescent girls. It takes a holistic view of the development of the children and attempts to improve both their prenatal and postnatal environments. Vijay Rattan⁶ (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. S.L. Goel⁷ (2004) observed that the ICDS scheme aims to improve the nutritional and health status of pre school children, pregnant women and nursing mothers through providing a package of services including supplementary nutrition, pre school education, immunization, health checkups, referral services and nutrition and health education..

Pre-school education is very important activity of the ICDS Program. This focuses on the total development of the children up 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. Samridhi Arora, Shaveta Bharti and Sarita Sharma⁸ (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. Roy C. Mathew⁹ (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. Aggarwal *et al.* (2000)¹⁰ 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. Manisha Jain¹¹ (2013) 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.

II. 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 all three ICDS Project namely Barnala, Sehna and MehalKalan 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 of Barnala.

III. METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objectives of the present study, all three ICDS projects of Barnala district of Punjab, namely Barnala ICDS project, Sehna ICDS project and MehalKalan ICDS project were selected for the study. Further 10 *Anganwadi* Centres from Barnala ICDS project, 10 *Anganwadi* Centres from Sehna ICDS project and 10 *Anganwadi* Centres from Mehal Kalan ICDS project were selected on the basis of random sampling. Total 30 *Anganwadi* Workers were also selected from each selected AWC for studies. Further, six children from three to six years of age were selected randomly from each *Anganwadi* Centre. So, total 180 children were selected from all these 30 *Anganwadi* centres. The study was conducted during August to December 2012. The present study was 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 was common language spoken in the Barnala district. 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 180 children from 3-6 years of age and 30 Anganwadi workers was edited. The data collected was analyzed manually and tabulated.

Findings : 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 180 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 crayon etc.

Table 1: Average data detail of Pre-School education beneficiaries children from 1 Jan., 2011 to 31 Dec., 2011.

(*Anganwadi Workers*)

	Total No. of Eligible	Total No. of enrolled	Attended activities zero days	Attended 1-14 days	Attended 15-24 days	Attended 25 days & above
Children from 3 to 6 years of age in Barnala ICDS Project	378	170	16	15	18	121
Children from 3 to 6 years of age in Sehna ICDS Project	384	163	47	8	7	101
Children from 3 to 6 years of age Mehalkalan ICDS Project	341	168	19	5	3	141
Total	1103	501 (45.42)	82 (16.36)	28 (5.58)	28 (5.58)	363 (72.45)

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

The Table 1 reveals that there were total average 1103 eligible children for pre-school education from 1 Jan., 2011 to 31 Dec., 2011 at all 30 AWCs. It was shocking to find that only 501 (45.42%) beneficiary children were enrolled in register of AWWs for pre-school education. Out of them, 82 (16.36%) children did not attend any pre-school education activity. 28 (5.58%) beneficiary children used 1 to 4 days for attended pre-school education activities. Again 28 (5.58%) children came 15-24 days for attended pre-school education activities while 363 (72.45%) children used 25 days and above to attend pre-school 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: Less than 50 percent beneficiaries enrolled for Pre-School education activities, what is the reason?*(Anganwadi Workers)*

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total AWWs
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Anganwadi centres far off.	01(10)	01(10)	01(10)	03(10.00)
Parent do not understand significance of pre-school Education	01(10)	----	01(10)	02(06.66)
Lack of facilities of water, space, light etc. at Anganwadi centres	01(10)	-----	02(20)	03(10.00)
The primary and private school teachers admit the children up to 4 years of age at their schools	07(70)	09(90)	06(60)	22(73.33)
Total	10	10	10	30(100)

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

Replying to the question about the main reason for less than 50% beneficiaries enrolled pre-school education activities at AWCs, as the Table 2 describes, it was found that a high majority (73.33%) 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 two (06.66%) AWWs felt that parents did not understand the significance of pre-school education. The remaining 10% AWWs blamed the lack of facilities of water, space, light etc. at AWCs as the main reason. It shows 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 are the beneficiaries for pre-school education programme.

Table 3: The child can count up to:
(Children)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total Children
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Up to 20	25(41.66)	28(46.66)	32(53.33)	85(47.22)
Up to 50	14(23.33)	07(11.66)	08(13.33)	29(16.11)
Up to 100	-----	-----	-----	-----
No response	21(35)	25(41.66)	20(33.33)	66(36.66)
Total	60	60	60	180(100)

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

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 three 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 is very unsatisfactory response of these Anganwadi children. It shows an

inadequate performance. 47.22% of the children were able to count up to 20, while 16.11% of the beneficiaries' children were able to count up to 50. Further, it was seen that 36.66% children did not give any response at all. This state of affairs is not encouraging.

Table 4: Children were given some stones to count and tell. Results show that they can- (Children)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total Children
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Count and tell the number	21(35)	20(33.33)	18(30)	59(32.77)
Cannot count and tell	26(43.33)	24(40)	30(50)	80(44.44)
No response	13(21.66)	16(26.66)	12(20)	41(22.77)
Any other	-----	-----	-----	-----
Total	60	60	60	180(100)

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

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 32.77% children of the selected sample were able to count and tell the number of stones, while 44.44% of beneficiaries' children could not count and tell the number of stones. 22.77% children did not give any response at all in this activity. This performance is again below expectation. The majority (67.21%) 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: The children were shown pictures of vegetables and by pointing to the pictures; they were asked to identify it. They- (Children)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total Children
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
Identified 1-2 pictures of vegetables.	27(45)	21(35)	24(40)	72(40.00)
Identified 3-4 pictures of vegetables.	13(21.66)	15(25)	16(26.66)	44(24.44)
Identified 5-6 pictures of vegetables.	03(05)	05(08.33)	07(11.66)	15(08.33)
No response of the respondent.	17(28.33)	19(31.66)	13(21.66)	49(27.22)
Total	60	60	60	180(100)

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

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 was seen from the data that 40% children could identify 1-2 pictures of vegetables, about 24.44% 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 27.22% of children did not give any response. It is also clear that the high majority (91.67%) children were not able to

identify all six pictures of routinely used domestic vegetables. Thus unfortunately, it shows again that the performance of the children is much below the expected level.

Table 6: The children were shown the chart containing 4 colours [Red, Yellow, Blue and Green] and they- (Children)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total Children
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	MehalKalan ICDS Project	
Knew 1 colour by name	26(43.33)	22(36.66)	23(38.33)	71(39.44)
Knew 2 colours by name	08(13.33)	08(13.33)	12(20)	28(15.55)
Knew 3 or 4 colours by name	03(05)	-----	03(05)	06(03.33)
No response.	23(38.33)	30(50)	22(36.66)	75(41.66)
Total	60	60	60	180(100)

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

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 merely six (03.33%) children could identify three of the colours by name and no could name all the four colours! About 39.44% children were able to identify one colour. While 15.55% could label two of the colours by names. It was abysmal that 41.66% 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 is extremely shocking to find that the high majority (96.67%) children were not able to identify three or four colours by name.

Table 7: Children were given a piece of paper and asked to make a shape and colour inside of the shape with a crayon. Results show- (Children)

Attributes	Responses			Responses of Total Children
	Barnala ICDS Project	Sehna ICDS Project	Mehal Kalan ICDS Project	
The child made shape and colour the inside properly	21(35)	15(25.00)	14(23.33)	50(27.77)
The child did not make shape and colour the inside	27(45)	28(46.66)	34(56.66)	89(49.44)
No response.	12(20)	17(28.33)	12(20)	41(22.77)
Any other	-----	-----	-----	-----
Total	60	60	60	180(100)

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

As Table 7 explains, it was found that about 27.77% children were able to hold the crayon and colour inside shape whereas it is deplorable that nearly half (49.44%) children tried to catch the crayon but they were not able to hold the crayon and colour inside shape, while 22.77% children did not give any response regarding this activity. It is also evident from the findings that high majority (72.23%) children were not able to hold the crayon and also were not able to colour inside the shape. Thus, on this count, the responses show poor performance of *Anganwadichildren*.

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 is dismal as almost all the things are below expectation level. Only 45.42% of the total beneficiary children were enrolled in register of AWWs for pre-school education. Regarding the learning skills of the children and their preparation for the formal school, it is very disappointing that in all 30 Anganwadi Centres, no child was able to count up to 100, a few 03.33% children could identify 3 or 4 of the colours by name. Only 8.33% children could identify 5-6 pictures of vegetables. 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.

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The children are the future of a nation."There is growing evidence from the fields of neuroscience, social science and psychology that the first five years play a significant role in children's learning. Recent findings reveal that the environment plays an important role in children's development." Therefore, it goes without saying that due priority should be given to address the needs of the children through ICDS by its more efficient implementation. Good pre-school experience has the potential to deeply influence the learning and development of the children. It can be concluded that the focus should be on child centered curriculum for their wholesome growth and development. 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 component 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. Emphasis should not be laid only on nutrition and immunization while implementing ICDS, but the children in their most impressionable early years must be prepared for formal school and a bright future. It is only then, that they can blossom into healthy and educated citizens our country can be proud of.

REFERENCES

- [1] P.Usha Rani, A.Laxmi Devi (2004), Integrated Child Development Services – A Study of Job Performance of Supervisor, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi.
- [2] <http://wcd.nic.in/icds>
- [3] Vijay Kumar (2009), Encyclopedia of Child Welfare and Protection, Anmol Publication Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- [4] V.MohanRao (2009), ICDS Taking Care of Nutritional Needs of Children, Kurukshetra, 58 (4): 9-12.
- [5] Annual Report 2012-2013, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, New Delhi, p. 223.
- [6] Vijay Rattan (1997), Integrated Child Development Services Program Administration, Vol-1, S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi.
- [7] S.L. Goel, (2004), Health Care System and Management, Deep & Deep Publication Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- [8] SamridhiArora, ShavetaBharti and Sarita Sharma, Comparative Study of Cognitive Development of ICDS and Non-ICDS Children (3-6 years) in Jammu and Kashmir, 2007. <http://wcd.nic.in/icds>, accessed on 3rd March, 2010.
- [9] Roy C. Mathew (2001), A Critical Analysis of the Problems and Prospects of Integrated, Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme on Women and Children in Kottayam District of Kerala, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala,
- [10] Aggarwal, A. K., Kumar, R. (2000), Long Term effects of ICDS Services on Behaviour and Academic Achievements of Children, India Journal of Community Medicine. 25 (3): 124-128.
- [11] Manisha Jain (2013), Strengthening and Restructuring of ICDS Scheme, Yojana, 57 (1): 64-65.