

# A Study on Growth and development of Pre-primary Education in Assam A Status Report

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## Abstract

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*Pre-primary education is the basic foundation upon which a child's educational and social, personal habits and values stand. Therefore, the stronger this foundation, the stronger the child will emerge in education and personality development. The national policy makers' awareness to this fact is reflected in formulation of various policies and directives in post colonial era. The state of Assam also witnessed a drastic change in early childhood education. Although the concept of Pre-primary education was evident in this state in few institutions since pre-independence era but the education system is devoid of a proper pre-school education system for children. It lacks not only the structural requirements of a minimum Pre-primary infrastructure but also the functional requirement of a formal Pre-primary teacher's education. However, remarkable efforts are being made at the government level through the SCERT, Assam and Sarva Siksha Abhijan (SSA), Assam for proper functioning and proper implementation of Pre-primary education in respect to teacher training, material development for classroom transaction, monitoring and evaluation system, etc. Various policies and programmes formulated by the Government of India as well as Government of Assam which were implemented in the state have been critically reviewed.*

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## **Introduction**

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) includes the Pre-primary stage of education. It provides a comprehensive aid in preparing the child for formal education, which begins with the primary stage. This early childhood stage is also important as a foundation for inculcation of social and personal habits and values that are known to last a lifetime. The crucial importance of investing in these early years to ensure an enabling environment for every child, and thereby a sound foundation for life, which is not only the right of every child but also something that will impact, in the long term, on the quality of human capital available to a country.

## **Policy Perspectives**

In order to keep track and respond to such emerging needs of ECCE, several international commitments, constitutional directives, legislative measures, policy framework, public initiatives, action plans and development planning were undertaken by Government of India in post-colonial era. The constitutional Eighty sixth Amendment Act has substituted Article 45 (Directive Principles of State Policy) to read that the state shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years. During the post Independence era, the Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) remarked that at the Pre-primary

stage, the child is introduced to the joy of learning through companionship and recreational activities and she/he is gradually guided towards the development of proper habits of life, cleanliness and a healthy mode of living. The National Education Commission (1964-66) highlighted the significance of physical, emotional and intellectual development of children, especially those from under-privileged background. The Commission recommended that there should be State level centre for the development of Pre-primary education located in the State Institute of Education. They stressed the need for coordination among different agencies that work for child care and Pre-primary education with regard to enrolment, a feasible target was to be sent for effective care of the children in the age group of 3 to 5 years. In 1967, a Parliamentary Committee on education stated that Pre-primary education should receive greater attention from Government as well as voluntary organisations. More emphasis should be laid on setting up Pre-primary institutions in urban slums, rural areas and for children belonging to weaker sections of the society with financial assistance from the Government. The National Seminar on Pre-primary education organised by the department of Pre school education, NCERT, held in 1971 and a study on the development of the Pre-school child conducted in 1972 also made significant recommendations,

these are (1) expansion of training facilities for Pre-primary teachers (2) development of various techniques for popularisation of Pre-primary education (3) promotion of optimum physical, mental, emotional and social development of the Pre-school child along with coordination of education, health, nutrition and welfare service, and (4) provision of a strong administration machinery.

The National Policy for children (1979 and 1986) specially emphasised investment in the development of the young child, particularly children from those sections of the population in which first generation learners predominate. Considering the holistic nature of proper child development viz. nutrition, health and social, mental, physical, moral and emotional development, Early Childhood care and Education (ECCE) should receive high priority and be suitably integrated with the integrated child development scheme (ICDS) wherever possible. Programmes of ECCE should receive high priority and be suitably child-centred, focused around play and the individuality of each child and discourage formal methods or the early introduction of the 3R's (reading, writing and arithmetic). The total community should be fully involved in these programmes.

The mid term assessment of Tenth Five year Plan (2002-2007) document has also acknowledged the ECCE as a first step in the educational ladder and reaffirms its priority for the development of

children with a special focus on early childhood care and education adopting 'Right Based' approach as advocated by the National Charter for children (2004) under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* too, which is one of the major initiatives of Government of India for universal retention by 2010 in a mission mode. A provision has been made for taking up the ECCE in the form of school readiness projects on a small scale under the innovative head. Provision has also been made under National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary level (NPEGEL) to establish ECCE centre at cluster level. National curriculum Framework, 2005 has also advocated the introduction of 2 years' early education for all children in the age bracket of 3-8 years.

### **Development of Pre-primary Education in Assam since Independence**

Prior to the reorganisation of the structure of education in Assam as per the recommendations of the Kothari Commission (1964-66), Primary schooling in the State was of 5(five) years' duration and the first 2(two) years of these 5(five) years were called classes 'Ka' and 'Kha' (i.e. classes A and B). The two classes were essentially a part of the formal system of primary education dealing with the teaching of the three R's. Therefore, classes 'Ka' and 'Kha' of primary schools in those days were not Pre-primary education in the true sense of the term, although the play

way method of teaching was employed in varying degrees in respect of the children concerned.

However, Pre-primary education was available in a few institutions before and after Independence. Kindergarten classes were also maintained in the Mission Girls' Middle English schools at Nagaon, Golaghat and Guwahati and in St. Mary's Convent and Sishu Vidyalaya, Guwahati.

The State Government had developed a policy of opening Pre-primary sections in each primary school so as to maintain continuity and coordination between Pre-primary and primary education. In 1963-64, there were 74 Pre-primary schools or classes all over Assam. The Pre-primary classes were gradually separated from primary schools, and sections were functioning independently during the period 1965-77. In 1968-69, some Nursery schools were started in a few towns of Assam for Harijan children with financial aid from the Central Government. In 1977, the number of Pre-primary schools catering to the educational needs of Pre-primary children rose to 307. Besides the Government, Missionaries and voluntary organisations were also engaged in imparting Pre-primary education.

Responsibility of administration of Pre-primary was in the hands of the Joint Director of Public Instruction for a few years. But when the duration of Primary schooling

was reduced to 4 years in 1973, following the implementation of the 10+2+3 structure, classes 'Ka' and 'Kha' were abolished. When the Assam Government decided in 1975 that more importance should be laid on Primary education, the stress on Pre-primary education decreased further. The number of Pre-primary schools in 1982-83 rose at a snail's pace to 482, out of which 400 were attached to Primary schools and rest were Montessori's, Kindergarten and Nursery schools recognised by the Government. Teachers of Pre-primary are designated as 'school mother'. In 1976, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) of the Social Welfare Department was introduced which provided to children till six (6) years of age food for nutrition, free health check up and informal education.

In 1994-95, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), in their pilot project, started 60 Early Childhood Care centre in Dhubri, Morigaon, and Darrang districts in the first phase. After that, on public demand, 300 such Early Childhood Care centres were established in all the 9 DPEP districts. Teachers (Malinis and Sahamalinis) were also trained as per the guidelines of NCERT.

In the year 1999, the Government of Assam introduced 'Ka-sreni' (class A) in each Primary school in Assam. However, no additional teachers have been appointed for the purpose. The number of Pre-primary sections of primary schools during the period

Table 1

**Pre-primary Institutions, Enrolment and Teachers in Assam**

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Pre-primary Institution</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Trained Teachers</i>
1970-71	72	2,601	92	63
1971-72	62	2,103	77	59
1972-73	65	2,194	83	61
1973-74	113	3,952	134	82
1974-75	150	5,402	174	100
1975-76	285	11,360	337	109
1976-77	307	13,254	344	111
1977-78	295	12,322	335	123
1978-79	293	13,964	300	89
1979-80	263	10,964	300	152
1980-81	291	12,674	326	167
1981-82	291	13,418	326	167
1982-83	482	19,089	482	168
1983-84	482	19,470	482	168
1984-85	482	19,920	482	168
1985-86	482	20,516	482	188
1986-87	482	16,034	482	188
1987-88	482	18,989	482	188
1988-89	482	20,950	482	218
1989-90	482	21,860	482	218
1990-91	482	22,635	482	218
1991-92	482	23,480	482	218
1992-93	482	24,520	482	218

(Source: Barua, Sailabala: *Sishu Siksha Aur Madam Montessori*, published by Banthi Prakash, Guwahati)

1999-2000 stood at 199 (Source: Directorate of Elementary Education). The number of Pre-primary schools at 482 from 1982 to 1994, but it decreased to 199 in 1998-1999. According to the Directorate of Elementary Education, the decrease was due to the discontinuance of Pre-primary sections with the retirement of the School Mothers in the schools concerned.

The only Government Pre-primary Teacher Training Institute at Dibrugarh has been upgraded to Basic Training Centre to increase the intake capacity of in-service teachers at the Primary level keeping in view the urgency of reducing the backlog of untrained teachers. There is one non-government Pre-primary Teacher Training Institute permitted by the government at Jorhat, started in 1987 where enrolment is on decline because trained pass-outs have no job prospects in the existing Primary setup.

### **Present Status of Pre-primary Education**

ECCE is recognised as a support programme for Universalisation of Elementary Education. In the context of realisation of Universalisation of Elementary Education, which is a national goal, ECCE assumes importance. Considering the significance of early years and its contribution towards making elementary education universal, Govt. of Assam in the year 1999, through a notification, passed an order for

opening *Ka-sreni* in all provincialised LP schools of Assam. This *Ka-sreni* was meant for children of 4-5 years and was equivalent to Pre-primary education. However, due to various constraints, the government was unable to provide any additional teacher for *Ka-sreni*. Barring a small number of schools in the erstwhile nine DPEP districts, *Ka-sreni*, in reality did not receive any attention in most cases and it was viewed as a liability/burden by the schools/teachers. As a result, till 2001-02 *Ka-sreni*, by and large failed to make any specific impact.

Thus, it is obvious that implementing *Ka-sreni* demands a great deal of understanding and skill on the part of the teachers. Without knowing or understanding what is *Ka-sreni*, what are its objectives, how it is different from other classes, how to help small children learn, it is not possible for the teachers to do their job. The problem becomes more serious when there is lack of adequate infrastructure such as teachers, space and materials.

In view of the above, the following Innovative activities were undertaken by the State for supporting *Ka-sreni* children and also capacity building of teachers for *Ka-sreni* during 2002-2008.

### **Training of Teachers on *Ka-sreni***

- *Sarba Siksha Abhijan Mission* (SSA) Assam had imparted 21626 nos of regular teachers

from 36456 schools on *Ka-sreni* till 2010-11 from inception (one teacher from one school). These trained teachers were assigned to run *Ka-sreni* at least for 2 and ½ hours besides their normal regular classes. These kind of schools of which *Ka-sreni* is catered after by regular classes are called “*Ka-sreni* Trained Teachers Supported Schools”.

- **Capacity building of teachers**

21626 teachers have been imparted induction training on early childhood education (ECE). Year-wise status of induction training is given below.

Table showing the numbers of teachers attended in induction Training (year-wise)

Sl. No.	Year	Number of teacher trained
1	2003-2004	1463
2	2004-2005	1873
3	2005-2006	1572
4	2006-2007	1258
5	2008-2009	4279
6	2010-2011	10016

Source: SSA, Annual Report

- **Engaging *Ka-sreni* workers**

SSA Assam has engaged community volunteers specially the female namely ‘*Ka-sreni* Workers’ to run *Ka-sreni* in single teacher school. They were engaged in 2008-09 and 2009-10. Only 20 per cent of the total single teacher school could cover by these *Ka-sreni* workers. A total of 1165 *Ka-sreni* workers have

been supporting *Ka-sreni* in the entire state. A six day district level residential training on *Ka-sreni* was imparted on these *Ka-sreni* workers.

- **Engagement of AWWs for *Ka-sreni* support**

The scheme of attaching AWWs (Angan Wadi Workers) of ICDS scheme in the nearby formal school (L.P. and M.V) with inadequate teacher strength for *Ka-sreni* support was started in 2003-2004. This prompted SSA, Assam to widen the coverage of reach of AWWs in the subsequent years.

- Reinforcement training and Review cum workshop were also organised for *Ka-sreni* workers and *Anganwadi* workers from time to time by SSA, Assam

- **Orientation of Head teachers**

In view of the fact that many AWWs and *Ka-sreni* trained teachers do not receive required support from the Head Teachers of their respective schools in implementation of *Ka-sreni*. It was therefore thought to orient the Head Teachers on principles of ECE, importance of *Ka-sreni*, appropriate methodology for ECE and role of Head Teachers in proper implementation of *Ka-sreni*.

### Awareness on *Ka-sreni*

- **Orientation of CRCCs, ABRCs-aca and RTs on *Ka-sreni***

Orientation of Cluster Resource Centre Co-coordinators (CRCCs),

Additional Block Resource Centre Co-coordinators-Academic (ABRCCs-aca) and Resource teachers (RTs) has been organised from time to time to make them understand about *Ka-sreni* related matter.

- **Meetings with SMC and Mothers' group**

Involvement of SMC and Mothers' group for the proper implementation of *Ka-sreni*

- **Organisation of Bal Mela at school level**

To make the teachers, parents and community aware about ECCE/*Ka-sreni*-its aims, objectives and activities of *Ka-sreni* 'Bal Mela' locally named as *Akanir Mela*' was organised in each school for *Ka-sreni* children.

- **Training of District Core Group (DCG)**

In 2003-2004 all districts had formed district core groups comprising of the DPO (ECE), one lecturer from DIET/DRC/BTC and four RPs (non-official with earlier experience of working for (ECE). All these members received induction training and 3 Reinforcement trainings on ECE.

### **Convergence with ICDS of social Welfare Department**

- To get a fruitful impact of the programmes at the grass root level, several convergence meetings at different levels viz. state, district, block were conducted among Education and Social Welfare

Department. Nearly 25000 Anganwadi workers were trained up under ECCE component of SSA, Assam so that they could perform the activities in their respective Anganwadi centre.

### **Teaching Learning Materials for *Ka-sreni***

- Teaching-Learning materials developed by SCERT, Assam
  - A workbook for *Ka-sreni* children in the light of NCF 2005 and adopted to other medium in Hindi, Bengali, Bodo, Manipuri, Nepali, Hmar Garo for children of Assam.
  - A Curriculum cum teacher's handbook for transaction in the classroom.
  - English has been introduced right from *Ka-sreni* since the academic session 2007-08. A workbook for the purpose has been developed by SCERT, Assam, incorporating child friendly activities to motivate children towards learning of English with the help of pictures, rhymes, games, etc.
- **Teaching-Learning materials developed by SSA Assam**
  - 'Thematic Activity Book'- a hand book for *Ka-sreni* teachers are provided to all *Ka-sreni* trained teachers, *Ka-sreni* workers and also to *Anganwadi* workers. so that teachers could plan properly and arrange activities for the children in a systematic way.



- 'Compilation of Songs, Rhymes and Games Books'- a hand book for *Ka-sreni* teachers are provided to all *Ka-sreni* trained teachers, *Ka-sreni* workers and also to Anganwadi workers
- 'Sabi-Aku, Rang karu'-an activity book for *Ka-sreni* children which was designed in 2005-2006 was printed and distributed to all the children of *Ka-sreni* of all the provincialised LP and MV and Tea Garden Managed schools. The books are being served as a resource book for teachers and help them to use the book for designing different activities.
- For effective use of the 'Drawing and colouring' activity book, pencil, rubber and crayon were provided to each children of *Ka-sreni* of all the Provincialised L.P and M.V and Tea Garden Managed Schools.
- A TLM Kit box comprising of 14 items was distributed to 4700 schools where *Ka-sreni* is supported by trained teachers.

### **Supervision and Monitoring Scheme for *Ka-sreni***

Though SSA, Assam has been supporting *Ka-sreni* since 2002, there was so far no specific strategy to understand how far these supportive mechanisms, have been effective, what specific support was needed for

qualitative improvement of *Ka-sreni*. With this realisations', Assam evolved a supervisory and monitoring system for *Ka-sreni* supported schools during 2005-2006.

### **Facilities and Activities in Schools**

It is observed that provision for various activities for the child in Pre-primary classes such as rhymes; storytelling, singing, dance, etc. are available in both Government and Private schools. In addition, writing of words and numbers are taught in these schools in accordance with the individual abilities of children through play way methods which puts unnecessary pressure on children at this tender age. However, the NCERT curriculum for Pre-primary stage and the recommendation that there should be no reading, writing and arithmetic (the 3Rs) has not been strictly adhered to.

### **Problems**

*Administrative:* Although national policies on the children's nutrition, etc. have clearly laid down broad principles of education of children and their nutrition, there is a lack of effective measures in the implementation of schemes in these areas.

- *Ignorance and Poverty of Parents:* Most of the parents especially of rural areas are totally ignorant of the necessity and utility of Pre-primary education. The majority of them are very poor having to

live hand to mouth and therefore, they are often not in a position to send their children to Pre-primary schools.

- *Lack of trained teachers:* Lack of properly trained teachers for Pre-primary school is a major stumbling block in the way of successful Pre-primary education.
- *Lack of Supervision:* Although a good number of Pre-primary schools exist in the state, their quality has suffered greatly due to inadequate supervision and guidance.
- *Mass apathy:* The people in general are not fully aware of the importance of ECCE.
- *Commercialisation:* Pre-primary schools have grown in large numbers, especially in towns. For a section of people, it has become a source of income at the cost of quality of Pre-primary education.

### **Conclusion**

Life period of a child from birth to about six years of age is of exceptional importance as far as possible his/ her growth and learning are concerned. If no advantage is taken of possibilities for learning and growth at this stage, it would be too late in the life of the child to make amends later. The outcome of the interaction of health, nutrition and psychological processes during these early years conditions the readiness of the child for school, which in turn influences the child's success in future. The child is a better achiever in adult life if she/he

grows up in a suitable environment at an early age. Children who are involved in Pre-primary education tend to participate in education to a much greater extent at later stages.

To work with children effectively and fulfil the objectives of the Pre-school education, a teacher should have special training in this field. Teachers' performance is the most important crucial input in the field of Pre-primary education. Whatever policies may be laid down, in the ultimate analysis, these have to be interpreted and implemented by teachers. During 1994-95, the Pre-primary Teacher Training centre at Dibrugarh was converted to a Basic Training Centre owing to the lack of enrolment in the institutions. Since the importance of ECCE is being realised, a Pre-primary teacher training centre needs to be reopened by the Government in the state of Assam as early as possible although the SCERT and SSA, Assam are involved in training up the teachers of *Ka-sreni* on ECCE.

### **Recommendations**

The curriculum of Pre-Primary and Primary level are not the same; as such the teachers dealing with the classes of Pre-primary must know the approaches and method of transaction properly because the teaching learning methods in both the cases are quite different. Therefore, for proper implementation and quality maintenance Government may appoint a separate teacher exclusively

for the Pre-primary classes who has experience and training on ECCE.

The parents are not acquainted with the importance of Pre-primary Education. Therefore, awareness programmes should be arranged among the parents and community so

that they could realise the importance of Pre-primary Education for all round development of their children.

For proper implementation of Pre-primary Education the government should arrange supervision and monitoring system from time to time.

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