

## An Evaluative Study of Early Childhood Care and Education Programme in Punjab

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### Abstract

*In the process of planning and formulating policies related to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), one major drawback that one faces is the lack of a well developed body of research in this field. It is only in the last two decades that researchers from various disciplines have become interested in studying the young child's growth, development and learning process. It has been discussed at various forums that ECCE has not been provided a due place which it deserved; instead it has been relegated to an innovative activity under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Hence, there is a need to evaluate ECCE programme under the provision of SSA. In the present research, descriptive survey method and purposive sampling technique were used by the investigator to collect data from 60 ECCE workers, 60 community members and 30 parents from Gurdaspur district of Punjab. Self constructed interview and observation schedule was used by the investigator to evaluate the ECCE programme. The investigator explored the views of parents, ECCE workers, community members, District Education Officer and Block Development Officer about the implementation of ECCE programme. The results reflect that there is a need to upgrade infrastructural facilities and teaching learning material in ECCE centres. The DEO and BDO received the funds regularly for ECCE under SSA and ECCE programme in their regime is successful whereas ECCE workers stated that funds are not properly utilised and there are problems of health, food and educational facilities and they deal with the problems on their own. The parents and community members are satisfied with the implementation of ECCE programme in their area and stated that funds are properly utilised and adequate arrangements at ECCE centres in terms of infrastructure and other facilities has changed the lives of children in their area.*

**Key Words:** SSA, ECCE Programme, ECCE centres, ECCE workers, Parents, Community, DEO and BDO.

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## Introduction

Realising the crucial importance of rapid physical and mental growth during early childhood, a number of programmes to promote ECCE were started particularly after the National Policy for Children (1974). The existing ECCE programmes include: Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) — a scheme where Central Government provides assistance to voluntary organisations for conducting Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres, Balwadis and Day-Care Centres. ICDS also provides assistance to pre-primary schools run by the state governments, Municipal Corporations and other governmental and non-government agencies, maternal and child health services through primary health centres.

The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* for universalisation of elementary education also realised the importance of early childhood care and education for improving the enrolment and participation of children in schools. Government decided to support ECCE programmes through SSA activities and funding.

SSA now provides support to habitations not covered by the ICDS and wherever the state government desirous of starting a pre-school education centre in the formal primary school. Support from the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* could be accessed through funds available under the head for innovative activity. In case of a new ICDS centre coming up in

such a habitation, the pre-school facility will necessarily have to work in conjunction with the ICDS.

A provision of up to ₹ 15,00,000 per year has been made for any innovative intervention including early childhood care and education. The elementary education plan has to have a plan for early childhood care and education. It also has to list the facility already created under the ICDS. The supplementary support for ECCE will always be in conjunction with the ICDS. Provision of honorarium for pre-school teachers, training of Anganwadi workers, activity materials, play items, etc., could be provided as support for ECCE centres.

Recognising the continuum of learning and development from 3-6 years, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* would make all efforts to develop an integrated approach to meet the educational needs of the pre-school children. Some illustrative interventions could be strengthening pre-school component in ICDS by need-based training of Anganwadi sevikas, development of learning materials, setting up of Balwadis as pre-school centre, generating awareness on importance of early child development through advocacy programmes, organising training programmes for community leaders, providing for intensive planning for ECCE, development of materials for ECCE related activities, promoting convergence between the school system and the ECCE programmes.

The provision of ECCE as part of innovative interventions under SSA has been a subject of discussion for lack of importance attached to it and for its inappropriate qualitative and quantitative expansion but the statement would need a research base to justify the claim. The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* realises the importance of pre-school learning and early childhood care and education and its role in improving participation of children in schools. In order to facilitate a greater convergence with the Integrated Child Development Services, efforts to strengthen them in the area of pre-school education have been made under SSA. Specific support is made available to existing ICDS centres from funds available under the head of innovative activity.

It has been discussed at various forums that ECCE has not been provided a due place which it deserves; instead it has been relegated to an innovative activity under SSA. Hence, the investigator felt the need to evaluate ECCE programme under the provision of SSA.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To evaluate the ECCE programme with reference to infrastructural facilities, curriculum and teaching learning material and classroom organisation
2. To explore the views of district level and block level officials towards the implementation of ECCE programme.

3. To explore the views of community members and parents towards the implementation of ECCE programme.
4. To find out the views of heads of ECCE centres and ECCE workers towards the implementation of ECCE programme.

### **Research Questions**

- Q.1 Is the existing infrastructural facilities, curriculum, teaching-learning material and organisation of classrooms, appropriate for the implementation of ECCE programme?
- Q.2 What are the views of district level and block level officials about the implementation of ECCE programme?
- Q.3 How community and parents view the implementation of ECCE programme?
- Q.4 What are the views of Heads of ECCE centres and ECCE workers about the implementation of ECCE programme?

### **Delimitations of the Study**

1. The study was confined to Gurdaspur district of Punjab.
2. The present study was delimited to ECCE centres located in Pathankot and Dinanagar blocks only.
3. Block Development Officer, parents and community members of only Pathankot and Dinanagar blocks were included in the study. The study was further confined

to District Education Officer of Gurdaspur district of Punjab.

4. The study was confined to ECCE heads and ECCE workers of ECCE centres of Pathankot and Dinanagar blocks of Gurdaspur district of Punjab.

### **Sampling**

There are 16 blocks in Gurdaspur district of Punjab. In the current study, the sampling frame includes all the ECCE centres located in Dinanagar and Pathankot blocks of Gurdaspur district of Punjab. Out of sixteen blocks, two blocks were selected. Out of two blocks, fifteen early childhood centres were selected from each block. A total of thirty early childhood centres were selected as sample for the study. Two ECCE workers were selected from each ECCE centre to make a sample of sixty ECCE workers. One parent was selected from each ECCE centre. Hence a total of thirty parents constitute the sample. Two community members were selected from the community where ECCE centre is located to make a sample of sixty community members for the present study. Block Development Officer from each of the two blocks and District Education Officer of the district was also incorporated in the study. As the respondents needed were required to express some views on implementation of ECCE programme, purposive sampling technique was used to draw the required sample from each strata.

### **Tools Used**

1. Interview schedule for District and Block Officials, ECCE workers and Heads of ECCE centres, community members and parents was developed to study their views about the implementation of ECCE programme.
2. Observation schedule for ECCE centres was developed to gather information on infrastructural facilities, classroom management, curriculum and teaching learning materials and classroom processes.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics has been used to describe the main features of the collected data in quantitative terms.

### **Major Findings**

1. The investigator found that in Pathankot block, 100 per cent of ECCE centres were located in urban areas and in Dinanagar block 60 per cent of ECCE centres were located in rural areas and 40 per cent in urban areas. In Pathankot, 80 per cent ECCE centres have pacca building structure and in Dinanagar, 70 per cent ECCE centres have pacca building structure. Fifty-six per cent of ECCE centres have adequate indoor space in Pathankot block and 60 per cent of ECCE centres have adequate indoor space in Dinanagar block. In Pathankot block, 27 per cent of ECCE centres have their own building whereas in Dinanagar

block, 25 per cent of ECCE centres have their own building.

2. The investigator found that in Pathankot block, 20 per cent of ECCE centres have small group seating arrangement and 80 per cent of ECCE centres have large group seating arrangement. In Dinanagar, 30 per cent of ECCE centres have small group seating arrangement and 70 per cent of ECCE centres have large group seating arrangement.
3. In Pathankot block, 24 per cent of ECCE centres have wall paintings as classroom interactive material, 33 per cent of ECCE centres have maps as classroom interactive material and 43 per cent of ECCE centres have charts as classroom interactive material. In Dinanagar block, 21 per cent of ECCE centres have wall paintings as classroom interactive material, 35 per cent of ECCE centres have maps as classroom interactive material and 44 per cent of ECCE centres have charts as classroom interactive material.
4. The investigator found that ECCE centres are run by government organisations. DEO of both the blocks stated that ECCE centres are run by the state government. Both the blocks have financial provision for ECCE programme under SSA. The blocks do not have any kind of collaboration with the NGOs. DEOs said that state provides guidelines for utilisation

of funds. DEOs of both the blocks agreed that ECCE programme is beneficial for the children. DEOs of both the blocks feel that National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) can facilitate the ECCE programme in their district.

5. The investigator found that ECCE programmes are satisfactorily running in both the blocks. BDOs of both Dinanagar and Pathankot blocks utilised funds to initiate the ECCE programme. Both the blocks provide some training to block level functionaries with regards to organisation or implementation of ECCE programmes. BDOs of both Dinanagar and Pathankot blocks consider the provision of funds per year per district adequate for ECCE Programme under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA). BDOs of both the blocks agreed that ECCE programme is beneficial for the children and feel that NCERT can facilitate the ECCE programme in their blocks.
6. ECCE centre is functional in both Pathankot and Dinanagar blocks. The investigator found that 86 per cent community members of Pathankot block and 80 per cent community members of Dinanagar block were aware about SSA. 70 per cent community members of Pathankot block and 81 per cent community members of Dinanagar block stated that funds are being provided to each block under SSA

for the development of ECCE. 70 per cent community members of Pathankot block and 62 per cent community members of Dinanagar block were satisfied with the functioning of ECCE centre.

7. The investigator found that in Dinanagar block, 27 per cent parents expect the pre-school centre to develop basic skills, 42 per cent parents expect the pre-school centre to provide free education facilities and 31 per cent parents expect the pre-school centre to provide free nursing facilities. In Pathankot block, 32 per cent parents expect the pre-school centre to develop basic skills, 39 per cent parents expect the pre-school centre to provide free education facilities and 29 per cent parents expect the pre-school centre to provide free nursing facilities.
8. In Pathankot block, 70 per cent of parents provide support to the child for better emotional development at the foundation stage and in Dinanagar block, 79 per cent of parents provide support to the child for better emotional development at the foundation stage. In Pathankot block, 90 per cent ECCE workers stated that the centre is useful for the community and in Dinanagar block all the parents agreed that ECCE centre is useful for the community. In Pathankot block and in Dinanagar block all the parents stated that they contribute towards the effectiveness of the centre in many ways such as resource generation in terms of funds and manpower.
9. Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) of both Pathankot and Dinanagar blocks admitted the availability of physical facilities, play material and equipments in ECCE centres. CDPO of both the blocks agreed upon the availability of work area/learning corners in the classroom, availability of setting/arrangement, material design and organisation of play activities. CDPO of both the blocks agreed that all the workers in their blocks are trained and for that training need of teachers are identified with reference to knowledge about child and pregnant women, providing proper knowledge of individual differences, providing adequate knowledge of nutrition.
10. In Pathankot block, 37 per cent of ECCE workers attended the training in 1991 and 63 per cent of ECCE workers attended the training in 2010. In Dinanagar block, 26 per cent of ECCE workers attended the training in 1991 and 74 per cent of ECCE workers attended the training in 2010. However before joining in Pathankot block, 66 per cent of ECCE workers attended the pre-service training and in Dinanagar block, 54 per cent of ECCE workers attended the pre-service training.
11. Both the Pathankot and Dinanagar blocks cater to under 6 years age

group. In both the blocks, all children spoke Punjabi at home and school. ECCE workers of both the blocks think that ECCE centres are necessary for children. In Dinanagar block, ECCE workers followed 8.00am to 12.00pm time schedule at ECCE centres and in Pathankot block ECCE workers followed 9.00am to 1.00pm time schedule at ECCE centres.

12. In Pathankot block, 58 per cent indoor activities and 42 per cent outdoor activities were organised at the centre by ECCE workers. In Dinanagar block, 63 per cent indoor activities and 37 per cent outdoor activities were organised at the centre by ECCE workers.
13. In Pathankot block, 27 per cent activities related to physical and motor development, 32 per cent of activities related to social and emotional development and 41 per cent of activities related to cognitive development are conducted by ECCE workers. In Dinanagar block, 38 per cent activities related to physical and motor development, 24 per cent activities related to social and emotional development and 38 per cent activities related to cognitive development are conducted by ECCE workers.
14. In Pathankot block, 40 per cent of ECCE workers used self made play material, 30 per cent of ECCE workers said that the quality of play materials was good and 30 per cent of ECCE workers said that the design/structure of play items were conventional. In Dinanagar block, 43 per cent of ECCE workers used self made play material, 37 per cent of ECCE workers said that the quality of play materials was good and 20 per cent of ECCE workers said that the design/structure of play items were conventional.
15. In Dinanagar block, 57 per cent of ECCE workers used work sheet to assess the development of children, 18 per cent of ECCE workers used children performance index to assess the children, 25 per cent of ECCE workers used participant observation to assess the children's development. In Pathankot block, 54 per cent of ECCE workers used work sheet to assess the children's development, 26 per cent of ECCE workers used children performance index to assess the children and 20 per cent of ECCE workers used observation to assess the children development.
16. In Pathankot block, for improvement of children behaviour, various activities are conducted by the ECCE workers and these activities relate to daily life requirements like proper adjustment and understanding with new environment. In Dinanagar block, 50 per cent of ECCE workers find that boys dominate group activities and in Pathankot block, 28 per cent of ECCE workers find that the boys dominate group activity.

## Recommendations

1. All children should have access to the benefits of good quality early childhood care and education, especially from low income communities.
2. Build capacity of key stakeholders such as parents, ECCE workers, community members to deliver quality ECCE services.
3. Stakeholders committed to improving school readiness and educational outcome should invest in bettering the quality of early childhood education.
4. District Education Officers in all the districts need to see collaborative early childhood efforts as a vehicle for education reform as well as a foundation for universal ECCE.
5. Community-based 'Early Childhood Organisations' should be encouraged with specific proposals for partnership. Provide awareness of ECCE through sensitisation programmes for communities and stakeholders.
6. Develop guidelines for establishment, operation and management of ECCE centres.
7. Develop monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure quality ECCE programmes.
8. Strengthen intensive and extensive research in ECCE to enhance the quality of the programmes.

## Suggestions for Further Research

1. A study of similar nature may be conducted with different variables and on larger sample size.
2. A study of qualitative nature may be conducted to understand the early childhood educators' inputs and their impact on children's preschool classroom experience.
3. Case studies of interventions and innovations in ECCE programmes across districts and states could be conducted.
4. A study of qualitative nature may be conducted to determine the type of strategies that are being implemented in ECCE programme to promote children's early learning.
5. A study may be conducted to assess the extent to which the early childhood educators engage children in language literacy, pre-numeracy and play way activities in their centres.
6. The longitudinal study to assess the effectiveness of ECCE programmes may be studied on the larger sample.